FULFILLING HER DESTINY

BY MRS. SOUTHWORTH

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from
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Xmas 1916.

Fulfilling Her Destiny

Sequel to "When Love Commands"

BY

MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

AUTHOR OF

"A Deed Without a Name," "Dorothy Harcourt's Secret," "To His Fate," "A Noble Lord," "Love's Bitterest Cup," etc.

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Fulfilling Her Destiny.

CHAPTER I.

MORE MYSTERIES.

I conjure you, by that which you profess,
Howe'er you come to know it, answer me.—SHAKESPEARE.

THE sun was sinking behind the snow-covered hills when Vandeleur once more drew up his sleigh before the long, low white house occupied by the priests and standing near the chapel of St. Rosalie.

One of the lay brothers in the fathers' service came out and took his horse, and led him around to the stable, while Vandeleur walked up to the house door, and knocked. Another lay-brother let him in and showed him into the same plain parlor he had occupied on his first call.

On this occasion he sent no card, but merely inquired for Bishop Waldemar. The lay-brother said that the holy father was in the chapel assisting at Vespers, but that they would soon be over. And now, indeed, in confirmation of his words, the vesper hymn arose sweetly on the air.

The lay-brother trimmed the fire, swept the hearth and, saying that he would tell the bishop as soon as the latter should come in—that the gentleman was waiting for him—went out and left Vane to himself, to beguile the time by the contemplation of the ecstacies and agonies of the pictured saints and martyrs on the walls.

Half an hour passed away, and then the door opened, and Bishop Waldemar entered—a fine looking old gentleman of, perhaps, sixty years of age, with a tall, stout form, a fair, clear complexion, noble features, and a well-shaped, bald head, encircled by a ring of silver hair, like

a winter-wreath or age's crown of glory. He wore the long, close-fitting black coat or habit of his order.

Vane arose joyfully to meet him.

"How do you do, my good son? *Benedicite! Benedicite!*" said the bishop, laying his hand lovingly, solemnly, on the black curls of the young man who had reverently bowed his head to receive this blessing.

"I hope I see you in good health, dear father," said Vane, when they were both seated opposite each other, on the high-backed chairs before the fire.

"Never better, Heaven be praised! And you, my son?"

"Tossed about with many tribulations, good father, I must confess; otherwise, in fair bodily health."

"You look so. But now you will want to know what brought me so suddenly here?"

"Yes, father."

"It was, first of all, a matter connected with my office. The subject of my going to Rome on a mission concerning the Church in America had been some little time on the tapis. It had been a subject of some correspondence between Archbishop Blanchelawn and myself. I had also mentioned the matter to my old spiritual director—Father Ignatius."

"You had known the reverent father before then?"

"Oh yes, long before; but not recently except by correspondence. Well, it chanced that on the day I received the notice that I should be wanted to go to Rome, I also got a letter from Father Ignatius, speaking of the same thing, of which he had heard, and asking me to take St. Rosalie on my way north, as he wished to bring me in communication with a brother priest here—one Francis Carroll."

"Yes," said Vane, "a very holy man. I have met him."

"A very holy man; but a very melancholy one. It was that I might see him personally and represent his case in the proper quarters so as to have him sent to Rome with me, or despatched upon some other mission that might help to dispel his melancholy, that Father Ignatius wished me to call here. Of course I was glad to come, as I also wished to have a talk with you."

"You have seen Father Francis?"

"No, not yet, he is gone on a round of sick calls, though most unfit for the duty. He was expected home sooner than this; but is now supposed to be in attendance upon some poor dying parishioner."

"He will sacrifice his life in such service. Who says there are not martyrs in these days?"

"No one. But now, my good son, about your own affairs. Are you very much attached to this young lady, Miss Berenice Brooke?"

"How did you know her name, dear father. I never took the liberty of mentioning it to you in my letters asking for testimonials," said Vane, in surprise, and without having answered the father's question.

"I knew it from the letters of my correspondent here," answered the bishop. "But now as to my question. Are you very much attached to the young lady?"

"I am devoted to her, father," said Vane, with the most emphatic earnestness.

"I am very sorry to hear it, my son; for you may not marry her."

"Heaven and earth! Everybody tells me that! Even she herself. Can not marry her! Must not marry her! It is enough to drive me mad! I beg your pardon, father, but I WILL marry her in spite of all the world, herself included! 'Must not marry her, indeed!'" exclaimed the sorely provoked lover, starting up, pushing his chair back and pacing up and down the room, between two opposite pictures of St. Lawrence on his gridiron and St. John in a heavenly vision.

"Compose yourself, my good son. I never said you 'must' not marry Berenice Brooke; and indeed when you have heard what I have to tell you, perhaps you yourself will say the same," mildly expostulated the bishop.

"Never! I will marry her—yes, I WILL marry her, in spite of everything and everbody on earth! Again I beg your pardon for speaking strongly, father; but I mean all I say—with all my strength I mean it!"

"Will you hear what I have to tell you?"

"Yes; but it will do no good, father. And perhaps I have heard it already."

"Have you heard of any trial or law suit that took place about nineteen years ago, in Charleston, South Carolina, in which the name and social position of Miss Brooke's father was very nearly concerned?"

"Oh yes, I have heard all that and a great deal more. I do not care for it at all. I will have Berenice for my bride, if I die for it. As for the trial, it ended most honorably for the Brooke family. It ended in the full establishment of Raphael Brooke's right to his name, rank and property, and in the utter confusion of the villain, Judah Brakeman, who had conspired to bring about the suit and who was afterwards compelled to fly the country for fear of a criminal trial. Was *that* all you had to tell me, sir?"

"Yes, my son, as your father had been my fast friend and you had been my ward and pupil, and as I was deeply interested in your future welfare, I thought it my duty to let you know of that trial, which had called in question the honor and standing of your intended bride's family, and by consequence left something of its shadow resting upon herself."

"'Left something of its shadow resting upon herself!' How could that be, father? How could that possibly be when the suit ended as it did?"

"My son, public opinion does not always coincide with the decision of a judge or the verdict of a jury; and there may be, I do not say that there are, persons who still question the race and lineage of Raphael Brooke and his daughter. Nay, how did I know but you yourself, in hearing of the affair, might have your painful doubts on the subject?—For these reasons I thought it my duty to put you in possession of the facts."

"Father, I thank you for your care of me; but the family of Miss Brooke, or rather her grandmother, caused me to be informed of the whole matter."

"And you feel satisfied?"

"Perfectly; with many thanks for your kind intentions. The question first originated, I believe, in the circumstances of Colonel Darusmont and his daughter being

strangers in South Carolina, and in the very dark complexion of the latter?"

"Yes, the charge was that she was a daughter by an illegal union with a quadroon slave."

Vandeleur made a gesture of disgust and indignation.

"As to the purity of Euphrasie Darusmont's race, father, *I* can put that beyond dispute if it be ever possibly called in question again. Euphrasie Darusmont was the half-sister of my grandmother. I never saw her, for she died before I was born, but I have great reason to remember her, for in my childhood I heard much of her beauty and also of my own striking resemblance to her; at which of course I always felt so highly complimented, that I may say I owe all the personal vanity I possess to that circumstance."

"My good son, you have your faults—self-will among the rest—but I do not think you can be justly charged with vanity. You surprise me, however. Mademoiselle Euphrasie Darusmont your great aunt? Why that makes you and Miss Brooke second cousins!"

"Half second cousins. No closer kin that that, thank Heaven, since she is to be my wife. I have not told her of the slight relationship yet; I have told her very little about my family. I shall take some convenient season to do so, however."

"Euphrasie Darusmont your relative!" said the bishop, looking fixedly at Vandeleur. "Well, you are like her, and you must have been very much more like her when you were a child; for your features have grown more masculine now. It is strange I never noticed the likeness; though indeed I was always haunted by a vague idea that you resembled some one I had known; but so many years had passed that I could not fix the fact."

"Was she darker than I am?"

"Just about as dark."

"Humph. Then I suppose if it should suit any clever villain to call the purity of my blood in question, he might do it upon the same grounds. Heavens! I hope I may never have the ill luck to meet Judah Brakeman. But it

is not probable—scarcely possible that I ever should. Oh, what incarnated demons there are upon this earth!"

"Yes, my son, and what embodied angels, too. That is some consolation."

"I don't know, my good father. The life of such a saint as Francis Carroll even can scarcely reconcile us to the existence of such a sinner as Judah Brakeman. But that two such opposites should be in the same planet at the same time."

"It is one of the conditions of our mortal life here. But Father Francis stays very late. I wish he would come," said the bishop, rising, and looking out through the window upon the snow-covered earth and darkening sky.

"Does he know that you are here waiting for him?" inquired Vane.

"Of course not. He did not even know that I was coming. Father Ignatius said nothing to him on the subject, partly because the old man is naturally reticent, and partly because those melancholy subjects must be treated with great prudence. My coming here must seem to be accidental, and my services to him must appear to grow out of the present circumstances," said the bishop, as he returned to the fire, and rang a bell.

A lay-brother answered it.

"Light here, if you please," said the bishop.

The lay-brother made a deep obeisance and left the room, but in a few moments returned, bearing two tall silver candlesticks with two tall wax candles lighted, which he placed upon the mantel-piece, one at each end.

Then he went out and brought in some logs of wood, which he laid upon the fire. Finally, he swept the hearth and closed the windows, and bowing before the reverend and distinguished guest, inquired if he could do anything else for his comfort.

"Thank you, no," answered Bishop Waldemar.

With another deep bow, the lay-brother informed the guest that Father Ignatius desired him to know that supper would be on the table at eight o'clock precisely. And having said this, he bowed himself out of the presence.

And still Father Francis did not come.

Half an hour passed in quiet talk, and then footsteps were heard crunching through the frozen snow; and, a few moments afterwards, the front door was opened and the same steps were heard in the hall.

"That must be Father Francis now," said Vandeleur.

"Probably," replied the bishop.

But the steps went up-stairs, and there was silence again for about fifteen minutes. Then the steps were heard coming down, accompanied by other steps, and the voice of Father Bonhomme, in his usually jolly conversation.

And the parlor door opened and the two priests entered the room.

"Ah! here again, Mr. Vandeleur! Glad to see you! Glad to see you! Hope you'll spend the night with us! Hope you'll spend a week with us, or a month!" exclaimed Father Bonhomme, cordially shaking the hand of the young man, who had risen to receive him.

"Bishop Waldemar, allow me to introduce to you—Father Francis Carroll," continued Father Bonhomme, presenting the other priest.

"JUDAH BRAKEMAN!" cried the bishop, recoiling in horror.

Father Francis threw his hands up to his pallid face and sank fainting upon the nearest seat.

The secret was out—the self-denying, holy saint, Father Francis Carroll was he who had once been the deeply-dyed sinner, Judah Brakeman!

CHAPTER II.

JUDAH BRAKEMAN.

"WHY, what is the meaning of all this?" inquired Father Ignatius, looking in astonishment from the amazed bishop to the overwhelmed priest.

"This is one whom I once knew under another name and other and most distressing circumstances," answered Bishop Waldemar, without taking his eyes off the subject of his speech. Then walking gravely up to the half-faint-

ing man, and laying a hand not unkindly on his shoulder, he said:

"Judah Brakeman, fear no reproaches from me; they are not for a sinner so bowed and broken as you seem—— Father Ignatius, a glass of wine, for the love of Heaven! He is sinking fast." The aged man struggled up to procure the desired restorative; but his feeble and trembling limbs refused to carry him from the room.

"Tell me where to get it?" exclaimed Vandeleur, starting forward.

"In the medicine chest on the top shelf of the corner cupboard in the room immediately over this. The bunch of keys hangs over the mantel-shelf."

"In the *medicine* chest, did you say the wine was, sir?" inquired Vane, doubtfully.

"Aye. The biggest bottle there, with the proper label, 'Old London Dock Port,' bottled in the year 1800. We keep it for emergencies like this."

Before the old man had finished half his speech Vane had darted off up stairs, and he soon returned with the powerful restorative in his hand. It was administered to the patient with excellent effect.

Judah Brakeman, or rather Francis Carroll, revived immediately, and in handing back the glass to Vandeleur, bowed his head in humble gratitude, and then turned it towards Bishop Waldemar.

"You have something to say to me, Judah Brakeman," said the bishop.

"Yes," was the reply.

"But are you able to say it now?"

"Yes."

At a sign from the bishop, Father Ignatius, Father Bonhomme and Vane Vandeleur arose to withdraw and leave the penitent alone with the bishop.

But Father Francis raised his hand with a deprecating gesture, and said:

"No, I beg that no one may leave the room. I have spoken, in the sanctuary of the confessional, and performed the penances enjoined upon me as the condition of

absolution, before, long before I presumed to take upon me the holy vows that bind me to the service of the altar."

"My son, since you have done all this, you should have found peace," said Father Ignatius, kindly.

"But I have not. The church has indeed absolved me; but my own heart has not," sighed the sufferer.

"The absolution of the church is final, my son, and you should have taken comfort from it. Your failing to do so shows rather a lack of faith and hope which is sad for one who has so much of the highest heavenly grace—charity," said Father Ignatius, gravely.

The sick man shook his head.

"Now *I* think," put in bluff Father Bonhomme, "that our friend here lacks neither faith nor hope; but that he *does* lack food and sleep. He fasts and watches too much and eats and drinks too little. Thus his frame is weakened and his spirits depressed, and his mistakes a craving stomach for an accusing conscience."

Father Francis smiled sadly and shook his head, saying:

"When you have heard the story that I shall presently tell you, you will understand me better."

Then with what degree of self-imposed mortification we may well imagine, the priest told the story of that criminal conspiracy that hurried Raphael Brooke prematurely to the grave, though it was afterward exposed, to the complete vindication of his memory.

"I would now like to say something in the palliation of a crime that otherwise would seem to be too great for pardon," said Father Francis, in conclusion.

"We shall be happy to hear anything you can say in mitigation," replied Bishop Waldemar, gravely. And the other hearers nodded in assent.

"You wonder, perhaps, why I hated my cousin Raphael, whose home, studies, and sports I shared?"

"Yes, I have wondered," said Bishop Waldemar.

"Because in the first place, I, who was born with a haughty and sensitive spirit, was a poor dependent on his family, and made to feel that dependence every day and in every way. Oh, well, they gave me a plenty to eat, drink,

and wear, and they meant to be very kind to me, no doubt."

"I am sure they did," said Bishop Waldemar.

"Yes; but there are very few who know *how* to be kind to a dependant, especially to one with the proud and sensitive spirit I had inherited from my deceased father. They were kind to me, but they always made me feel that Raphael was the 'crown prince,' and I but the poor cousin. I shared his room, but slept on a narrow cot plainly covered; while he occupied a handsome rosewood bedstead, richly furnished. As a boy, he wore velvet tunics; I, only velveteen. He sat above me at the table, stood above me in the class, and rode inside of the carriage, while I rode on the outside box, by the coachman—a seat that I really should have preferred, under other circumstances than those humiliating ones."

"But, my son," said Father Ignatius, "these little mortifications are such as many a younger brother has to bear instead of the elder."

"I know not how that may be, father, but, I think, had I been a younger son of that family, with both a natural and lawful claim upon their love and support, I should not have felt these affronts; but being what I was, the poor cousin—the penniless dependant—I felt them very keenly."

"It was a morbid sensitiveness."

"Perhaps. Father Waldemar, I have told you all about that conspiracy, but I did not tell you what first suggested it to me. I reserved that portion for my poor defence."

"I shall be happy to hear anything whatever that you can say in your defence," somewhat coldly replied the bishop, who had not been pleased by the reflections that seemed to be cast upon the memory of the Brookses.

"I had but one friend in the house—that was John Brooks, a very light mulatto, who had been my father's servant, but who, at the breaking up of his fortunes, was sold at auction and purchased by Raphael Brooke's father. This man was *very* light indeed, for a mulatto—quite as light, in fact, as Raphael himself; and there was, besides, a very suspicious resemblance between himself and his mas-

ter, so that people whispered they were half-brothers. And though he was called John Brooks, and not Brooke, the same people said if he had a right to any name at all, it was to the latter."

Bishop Waldemar nodded several times, and sighed deeply.

"One day," continued Father Francis, "when 'the iron had entered my soul' more deeply than ever, I ran out to the stables to hide myself and weep alone. But I found John Brooks there, grooming Raphael's horse. *I* had no horse. He asked me what was the matter. I told him. I have forgotten what it was, sir; but it was some affront that had wounded me to the quick. However, I was smarting with it then, and I told him of it in very bitter terms. He replied:

" 'Master Raphael needn't put on so many airs. If the truth was known, I reckon, you've got more right to do so than he has.'

" 'What do you mean? He is the rich heir—I am only the poor cousin,' I said, very bitterly.

" 'Never you mind—time may come when *you* may be the rich heir, and he may be the poor cousin—or, no—not even so much as that, for you, white people, don't acknowledge that sort of poor cousin, and you wouldn't own him no more than his father does me.'

" 'What on earth do you mean?' I now asked, greatly interested.

" '*Look how dark he is.*'

" 'EH?'

" 'Look how dark he is—darker than I am, and I'm a mulatto.'

" 'WHAT?'

" 'And look at his mother, how dark she is—*darker* than I am, though I'm a mulatto.'

"I had only been able to gasp forth monosyllables in answer to his startling suggestions. And now I could not even do that. I was breathless. He continued:

" 'Can anybody here tell where his mother came from, who she is, whether she is white or colored, free or slave? No, they can't. And as long as the old master lives, they

won't try to find out. But let him once die. Then see who'll be the rich heir and the young master; and who'll be the poor cousin—yes, and perhaps the poor slave, too.'

"I do assure you I was still so utterly bereft of the power of speech, but the conflicting emotions of astonishment, joy, anticipation of triumph, and gratified revenge, that I could make no answer to this.

"'Now, don't you go and say anything of what I have told you; for it will only hurt you and ruin me. But whenever they peck on you, or put you down, or hurt your feelings so you can hardly bear it, like they did to-day, you just fortify your mind with thinking how you'll take your satisfaction out for it all, when the time comes,' said John Brooks.

"He evidently and entirely believed the case to be as he had put it to me. And *I* believed it from the bottom of my heart."

"'Your wish was father to your thought,'" sadly repeated Bishop Waldemar.

"Probably; but I was too young a metaphysician to analyze the matter then. I only believed in it. As soon as I recovered my breath and my speech I promised John Brooks not to speak or hint what he had told me; but to keep it to myself to comfort me when oppressed."

"Oh, my son! were you *ever* oppressed by that most generous family?" painfully inquired the bishop.

"I thought so, father, at least. However, I buried the secret in my bosom, and I brooded over it. And whenever I met Raphael's full, black, long-lashed eyes, or gazed upon his dusky cheek, or closely curling black hair, on all the dark, bewildering beauty that had once been my envy, I chuckled with secret satisfaction and looked forward to the day of my triumph."

The priests regarded the speaker with a new and curious interest; but seldom interrupted his narrative by any observation.

"Time passed on, and I brooded, brooded over the suggestion that had been made me—the secret that had been confided to me, as I considered it. Whenever I was subjected to mortification, I had my deep satisfaction in that

secret. I could do nothing in it then, for I was a minor, and without friends or money to help me; and even if this had been otherwise, I felt that I still could not have moved successfully in the matter, for surely I knew that the old man during his lifetime might enjoy his own property, and live how and with whom he pleased. But, when in the course of nature he should come to die——!—that was the time of my anticipated triumph."

Here the priest's eyes gleamed with something of their old fire; and for the moment he seemed not the penitent, bowed down with remorse, but the plotter waiting for his prey. His next word nearly confirmed this impression.

"I waited for that time. Spring followed winter, and autumn succeeded summer, and the years rolled on, and I and my rival approached manhood. My one idea had become a monomania, a brooding madness."

"Ah!" groaned Father Ignatius, "it is easy to see that."

"At length, the time I had so long anticipated came. Both parents of Raphael Brooke died of a malignant fever that was prevalent in the city that summer. I had been for some years, with the secret aid of John Brooks, covertly collecting evidence to support the claim I intended to put in for the possession of the estate, as soon as my uncle should die; so that I was almost ready for action; for, gentlemen, I fully believed that my cousin Raphael was a quadroon, the son of a slave, and incapable of inheriting his father's estate. I say this in some slight palliation of the course I pursued."

"That belief may seem to have mitigated your act in attempting to wrest the estate from its rightful owner; but what have you to say, Judah Brakeman, in defence of that greater guilt, of charging your cousin, the son of your benefactor, with theft and forgery, and so overwhelming him with undeserved shame, as to hurry him prematurely to his grave?" demanded Bishop Waldemar.

Father Francis bowed his head, and moaned as one who had received a wound, and then answered slowly:

"I was coming to that, when you interrupted me. I said that I had collected quite a mass of evidence—mere circumstantial evidence, that proved nothing, however,

when subjected to investigation before a judicial tribunal; but evidence that I then believed to be strong enough to hurl my hated rival from his rank and to place me in his position. I was almost ready for the spring, when a singular thing occurred. Four weeks after my uncle's death, a will was produced, in which he devised the whole of his real estate and personal property to his only son Raphael."

"Do you call that a singular thing?" smiled the bishop.

"Under the circumstances, I do. Since Raphael was his only son, he would have come into the whole property as a matter of course. The will was wholly unnecessary. The exhibition of such a document, therefore, seemed to prove to my perverse mind one of two things: either that Colonel Brooke, knowing his son Raphael to be incapable of entering upon his property as heir-at-law, had therefore executed this will devising it to him; or else that Raphael himself, knowing his own real position, and feeling the instability of his inheritance, had actually forged the document to secure his possessions. And when I recalled my late uncle's incurable habits of indolence and procrastination, I strongly inclined to the latter theory."

"And you actually persuaded yourself that your noble-minded cousin was capable of committing a felony!" exclaimed Bishop Waldemar, in a tone of great pain.

"Oh, heaven pardon me, I did," groaned the priest. "And nothing, let me say, but that strong persuasion could have palliated my guilt in the course I pursued. There were several other circumstances also that seemed to corroborate and confirm my own secret conviction. As, for instance, the lawyer who drew up the document, and the two witnesses who signed it, were all dead of the epidemic fever—*selected from among the dead by the forger*, as I thought. You know the rest. When Raphael Brooke married, and went on his wedding tour, he left me in charge of the house; but he took with him a cabinet of valuable documents, and also a casket of family jewels. This enabled me to add the charge of theft to that of forgery. This is all I have to say in palliation of my great offence. It was begun in a brooding

monomania, and it was carried on in reckless frenzy. I did not think it would have killed him; but after he died, and after the judicial investigation brought out the truth in the full light of day, and showed me what he had been, and what I really was—oh! then I came to myself. The madness of many years passed away. I saw myself in such hideous colors, that I could not bear the contemplation. I saw myself in all but the overt act—a murderer! What torture of remorse I have suffered—do still suffer—it is needless to say. You can all see its ravages in these wasted cheeks and hollow eyes—in this bowed and broken form!"

Vandeleur, looking on Father Francis, thought he seemed more like a young man fading away in a consumption, than a middle-aged man dying of remorse; and he remembered also how often he had heard him called the "young priest of St. Rosalie;" but then, no doubt, the clear and delicate complexion, the brightly flushed cheek, and the brilliantly beaming eyes that marked his malady, also enhanced the youthfulness of his looks, and then, again, he *was* young in comparison with the other priests, who were really old.

The speaker went on to say:

"Not for a moment, by day or by night, sleeping or waking, has this 'worm that never dieth' ceased to gnaw! No absolution has absolved me to myself! No penance has atoned for my sin! No prayer has brought me peace! I fled the country, not in fear of a criminal prosecution for conspiracy, as I was accused of doing, but to try to get rid of my remorse. I went to Scotland, where I had an uncle—my father's elder half-brother, whose name was Carroll. He had been very much attached to my father, and was very glad to see me. He was then a childless widower, with a large estate, and no near relative except myself and Hildreth McAlpine, his deceased sister's child."

"Hildreth McAlpine!" simultaneously exclaimed every voice in the room.

"Yes; I can understand your surprise. You are thinking of Halcyone McAlpine. Well, you shall understand

it all presently. To return to my Scotch uncle: Under the circumstances I have named, he proposed to make me his heir, upon the condition that I should take the name and arms of Carroll of Kilburninch, and marry Hildreth. I had not the slightest objection to do either, as I told my old kinsman. Indeed, my own name had become hateful to me—I called myself 'Judas'—'Judas,' day and night. Well, I went through all the proper forms to make it legal, and took his name entire, Francis Carroll. Hildreth was a lovely Scotch lassie. You may judge how lovely when I tell you that Halcyone is a facsimile of her mother. I loved her so much that my love mitigated—but even it could not quite cure—the pangs of my remorse. I gained her affections and married her. And we lived harmoniously if not happily—(how could I be happy?)—with our uncle, all of which so pleased the old gentleman that he settled his estate upon us and our heirs forever. We remained with him until he died, which was not until we had been married five years and had three children—the two eldest being twin boys, who were born in the second year of our marriage, and the youngest a girl born in the fourth. After the funeral, I put the estate in the hands of a skillful agent, and yielding to the restlessness of my remorse, which had grown into a mental disease, I took my beloved Hildreth, from whom I could not bear to be parted for a day, and her babe, whom she would not leave behind, and we travelled by land and sea over the whole civilized world. We went to both the Indies and to Africa. We penetrated the North as far as Lapland and Finland, and the South as far as the Cape of Good Hope. It was in our last voyage home from the East Indies when——"

Here Father Francis paused, and was so overcome by his emotions that he remained silent with his hands over his eyes for some moments.

Father Ignatius, with his trembling hands, poured out a glass of that powerful port-wine, and pressed it upon him. He put his lips to the glass, scarcely more than that, and seemed refreshed. He then continued his story:

"It was on our last voyage home from the East Indies that our ship was suddenly overtaken by one of those terrible typhoons incident to the Indian Ocean. The ship, with nearly all the officers, crew and passengers, was lost! How I was saved I scarcely understand, even now. I lost consciousness, while trying to support the form of my beloved wife, as we were violently tossed up and down and hither and thither by the fury of the waves; I found it again when I lay bruised and broken and almost breathless and lifeless upon a narrow berth in the cabin of a mission-ship, with a mild-faced Jesuit brother bending over me. I will not bore you with an account of my recovery. My life was saved though it was not worth the saving."

"Do not say it was not worth the saving, since He who gave it saw fit to preserve it, even amid great peril. But go on, my brother," said Father Ignatius.

"I could not at first learn anything about the fate of my family and my late companions, for the merciful men who had me in charge kept me under the influence of opiates, to allay the agony of body and anguish of mind under which I should else have suffered the most horrible tortures. At length the time came when I was told that my beloved wife and her beauteous babes had perished in the waves, and I was a childless widower! Then I longed to die, and prayed for death, and had a relapse that brought me very near the grave, indeed."

"It was in the Divine Mercy that you did not perish body and soul in that state of rebellion and mortal sin," said Father Ignatius, solemnly.

"It was," meekly admitted the priest, bowing his head. "I soon learned to look upon my preservation in that light."

"Go on, my brother."

"We cannot always die when we wish. I, loathing my life, recovered, and then I learned more. I was on board a Spanish ship bound from India to the Brazils, with a band of Jesuit brothers, going out upon a mission to the Indians of Amazonia. My lifeless form had been picked up, with the body of my beloved wife clasped to

my bosom, her arms clinging to my neck, and her flowing raiment and long hair wound 'round and 'round me by the rolling of the waves, so that it was difficult to separate us. They had great trouble in resuscitating me, and no success at all in their efforts to restore her. She was quite dead. And while I lay breathing, but unconscious of all that was passing around me, with requiem and prayer, they solemnly committed her body to the deep again. No one else had been picked up, and I only was saved—to suffer."

"To expiate, my brother, to expiate! and thus to save your soul—your immortal soul as well as your mortal frame," put in Father Ignatius.

"I repeat that I soon learned to look upon my life in that light. Before this great sorrow, I had never been a Christian; now I considered my awful bereavement as a just judgment of Heaven upon my almost unpardonable sin. My despair was very deep. But I cannot tell how good the Jesuit brethren were to me, with what gentle hands they led me to the light and showed me how the greatest sin might be forgiven, the greatest sinner saved, and heaven itself gained by repentance, faith, and good works. Before we landed at Rio de Janeiro, I had thrown myself into the bosom of the Church. Not then—not for a long time afterward did I dare to breathe my secret aspiration to devote my life to the service of her altars. When, at length, I ventured to mention this wish, I was accepted, encouraged, and helped. Passing through all the probations and preparations, I became in due time a servant of the Church. After having served some time in a remote parish in Brazil, I was sent home in search of the health which I could not find, since my illness had its origin in the 'mind diseased.' Later on, I was sent here—of all places, *here*, where I should have before me forever the fair widow of my murdered cousin, to reproach me with her uncomplaining presence. They who sent me know not all they did, nor would I ever tell them. I obeyed the mandate in silence and accepted the trial as a penance, offering it up as some little atonement for my great sin."

"Did the ladies of Henniker, or any of them, recognize you?" inquired Father Bonhomme.

"No—how should they? Not one of them had even met me face to face before. Not even Mrs. Brooke, who was the defendant in the suit I brought against the heirs of Raphael Brooke in the Circuit Court sitting at Charleston, nor Mrs. Jernyngham, who was in the city at the same time, ever set eyes upon me."

"That is true," said Bishop Waldemar. "Mrs. Brooke was extremely ill during the whole progress of the trial, and Mrs. Jernyngham was in close attention upon her. Mrs. Brooke only appeared in court through her attorney. And Madam Jernyngham not in any way."

"So the ladies had never seen me; and as I bore another name they never suspected my identity with Judah Brakeman. But oh! the deep pain of meeting them almost every day! of being the object of their tenderest commisseration and most generous bounty! I avoided profiting by these merciful ministrations in my own person and always took the wines and broths and jellies they sent me to the sick poor of the parish."

"And in that you did the ladies and yourself both injustice; for even had they known who you really were, seeing you what you are now, trying to atone for your past life by holy works, wearing your health and life out in the service of the poor and the sick, as Christian women, they would still have ministered to you. But I have no doubt it was to save them the pain of having the old wound re-opened that you refrained from making known your identity to them," said Father Bonhomme, kindly.

"It was indeed," replied the younger priest; "but the concealment was another cause of pain to me—a secret gnawing pain that you can well understand; for under most circumstances confession is a great relief to the soul. I had, as I told you, confessed, done penance and received absolution long, long before; but I had not found peace. I felt that to have confessed to them and received their pardon might have brought me peace, indeed, but it would have given them great pain. So I refrained and

bore my secret burden in silence. One day in balmy summer, when I had been here some nine months, in the midst of my deep sorrow, I received a sudden and overwhelming joy.

"It was the discovery of your daughter's existence," said Father Waldemar.

"Yes; though I had never until this hour made known my discovery to any one, not even to her, for it became a part of my self-imposed penance to deny myself the delight of owning and loving my child. However, the time must have come, and is now near at hand, when she must be identified; for she is in right of her mother, as well as of myself, the heiress of Kilburninch." He passed his hand wearily over his brow and then continued:

"The manner of my discovery of her was this: It was Whitsunday, and we were celebrating high mass, when a new voice in the choir startled me—and not because it was new, but because it seemed more like that of a seraph than any voice I had ever heard but one—that loved one which I should mourn as silenced forever in the deep, did not religion teach me to hope it is singing in the choir of angels in Heaven," said the priest reverently, raising his eyes.

"It was a fresh, pure, clear soprano voice that seemed to wing its way to the highest empyrean and float in sunshine there. It was the *Gloria-in-Excelsis* she was singing. *Gloria-in-Excelsis!* and as it soared and floated through all the sunny air, a thousand angel harps seemed to accompany it! *Gloria-in-Excelsis!* Never was my soul so filled and lifted with faith and love! with joy and praise!"

"Yes, we are all familiar enough with that sweet voice by this time," said Father Waldemar, with a smile.

"After the services were over, I inquired of our old organist who the new soprano was in the choir that morning.

" 'Not a new voice, sir, though a very young one. She has been here singing in our choir ever since she was seven years old, and she must be about fifteen now,' answered my old man.

"'Then why have I not heard her before?' I inquired.

"'Because she has been at sea ever since you have been here, sir.'

"'At sea!' I exclaimed, for indeed I was very much surprised at his words.

"'Yes, sir. I should have explained at first, when I said that she had been singing for us so many years, that she has been doing so while ashore; but she's afloat most of the time.'

"'Afloat,' I echoed, more surprised than ever. 'Who is she?'

"'Old Captain Tom Storm's child, sir, or rather his adopted child.'

"'What is her name?'

"'Miss McAlpine, sir; Miss Halcyone McAlpine.'

"At hearing this name I dropped in my chair, as if I had been shot. Her voice, such a marvelous resurrection of her dead mother's voice! Her name the same as her dead mother's maiden name! Her age corresponding to what would have been the age of my daughter who was lost at sea, had been saved: the fact of her being the adopted child of an old sea-captain—all these facts whirled through my mind, raising a confusion of the wildest hopes.

"'How came the old man to adopt this child, do you know?' I asked.

"The organist looked at me in some surprise, I suppose, to find one whom he had never before known to be a news-hunter, so curious on this subject. However, he was a willing gossip, and he told me the whole story, the story that the open-hearted old seaman had told to all the country around and with which, of course, you are well acaquainted. How the old captain picked her up from the wreck of an East Indiaman in the Indian Ocean, on a certain day, in a certain year, which, of course, I found to correspond exactly with the day and year in which my child was supposed to have been lost; how the captain, finding no clue to her name and parentage, except the half-faded initials and letters, 'H. McAlpine,' had named her Halcyone, because he said, from

the time she was taken on board, the sea, which had been tempestuous, had calmed down, and continued calm during the remainder of his voyage. He told me farther of the great mutual love that had grown up between the old man and his protégée, and how, from the time of his finding her she had been the companion of nearly all his voyages, and had come to be almost as good a seaman as he was himself. But all this you know," said Father Francis.

"Yes we know all that," answered Father Bonhomme, speaking for the company.

"But what you do not know is the reason why the child's little clothing should have been marked with her mother's name, and not her father's—it was this: The old friends of my beloved wife always spoke of our child as the living image of what her mother had been at her age, and called her the second little Hildreth McAlpine; so, in honor of my wife, I resolved that she should be indeed another little Hildreth McAlpine; and though she had a legal right to my name also, and should go by it in all legal documents, yet in the family she should be called only by her mother's. So all her baby-clothing, her nursery silver, and her little jewelry were marked 'H,' or else Hildreth McAlpine."

"You may easily imagine, Bishop Waldemar, that I lost no time, next day, in making a pastoral call on the old sea-captain, at his residence at Stormy Point. There, for the first time, I saw my child—the lovely image—the resurrection of her dear mother, as I had seen her first in Scotland. Sorrow has disciplined me in self-government, and I tried to repress the great emotions that swelled in my bosom; yet, when I touched her hand, and met and knew and felt her to be my child and the child of the beloved wife I had so cruelly lost in our youth, and at the same time knew and felt that I durst not fold her to my heart or touch her forehead with my lips, my brain reeled, my heart fainted, and for a moment I sank back and lost consciousness. Oh! the weakness was, of course, attributed to ill health. When my senses came back again, I found that it was my child's arm that supported

my head—my child's hand that held the wine to my lips, while the old man stood over us both, wielding a great palm-leaf fan, and raising a wind about us like a gale at sea. I excused myself as well as I could, received, with all humility, Captain Storm's advice never to overexert myself so much again by riding so far on horseback, but always to take a carriage, and then I shortened my visit and departed. Indeed, I did not dare to trust myself longer with my child at that time. Later on in the year, when I had become more accustomed to the thought of her restored existence, I saw her again and heard from Captain Storms, who was always ready to tell the story to any and everybody who showed the least interest in his protégée a full account of her rescue. You have all heard it."

"Oh, many times," said Father Ignatius, speaking for the rest.

"I have now been here, as you know, nearly three years; but in all this time I have neither revealed myself to my child, as her father, nor confessed myself to the ladies of Henniker, as their ancient foe; though to have done both would have brought me peace."

"You must reveal yourself in both characters now, as the first step towards regaining the peace and health you have lost," gently replied the bishop.

The repentant man bowed his head and said:

"Peace may come with Heaven's pardon, but health never, in this world! Bishop Waldemar—Father Ignatius, my story is told, as my life is nearly ended."

"I trust not, my son. You know not how much of health has been lost, through loss of peace, and will be found again with it. I can pledge myself, for the ladies of Henniker, that they will extend to you not only forgiveness but sympathy, and continue to you all the pious ministrations they have been accustomed to offer," said Father Ignatius, kindly.

Then Bishop Waldemar, seeing the great weakness of the invalid, advised him to retire at once.

And Father Francis, receiving all advice from such a high quarter as a command, immediately obeyed.

And then Vane Vandeleur, declining the priests' pressing invitation to remain to supper, but promising to return the next day, departed for Stormy Point, to keep his engagement with the old captain.

CHAPTER III.

HALCYONE'S PERPLEXITIES.

WHILE Vane Vandeleur was halting at the outer gate leading from the grounds of St. Rosalie to the high-road, and waiting for the slow fingers of the old porter to open it, for it had been locked for the night, there came running towards him one of the lay-brothers, who paused, in a breathless condition and handed him a note.

Vane opened it and read:

"You are going straight on to Stormy Point, and to the presence of my dear daughter and her kind guardian. May I commission you to tell them both what you have heard this night, suppressing only that part of my story which, however justly reflecting upon me, would be very painful to her. I ask you to do this, because, in the present shattered state of my nerves, I am incapable of participating in the great excitement that such a disclosure would at first raise. But I will try to see them to-morrow, when a night of repose shall, by Heaven's mercy, have calmed us all. F. C."

Vandeleur read this note twice over, and then he who, three hours before, had said he hoped never in this world to have the ill luck to meet Judah Brakeman, lest he should be tempted to do that which would darken his own life with remorse—he, I say, detained the panting lay-brother, while he tore off the blank leaf of the note, and, with his pocket-pencil, wrote this answer:

"Yes. I will do all that you entrust to me with dis-

creation and tenderness; and to-morrow when you come to Stormy Point you shall find 'them' prepared to receive you in your new relation and without excitement.

"V. V."

He gave this to the waiting lay-brother, who went off with it.

And then, as the gate was open, and the road before him, he started his horse and pursued his journey with lightning speed.

He had not flown far down the road before he heard a voice calling after him:

"Halt!"

"Wondering who it might be that called, and almost expecting to see another runner from St. Rosalie after him, Vane "halt"-ed and looked behind him.

The caller was young Clarence Fairlie, mounted on a fine horse, and coming after him as fast as the slippery state of the road would permit.

"Fairlie—'halt,' yourself, or moderate your speed; it is really dangerous to attempt to gallop over such ice-glaced roads as these!" exclaimed Vandeleur.

"I know it must be, but I was anxious to overtake you," replied the youth, riding up to the side of the sleigh.

"I hope your animal is rough-shod?" said Vane, frowning and squinting suspiciously at the horse's heels.

"No, I'm sorry to say; and that is the worst of it. But I really hadn't time to send him to a blacksmith. I was in too great a hurry."

"I trust that no bad news has brought you out in such recklessly hot haste," said Vane.

"N-n-no," answered the boy, blushing deeply; "but, you see, I have not seen Halcyone for nearly a week—not, in fact, since the evening of the surprise party at our house."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Vane—not that he was the least surprised at the long separation alluded to by Clarence, but because the boy paused and seemed to expect him to be so.

"No, indeed! though I have been out every evening to

the houses of mutual friends, where I used to see her so often, I have not seen her once this week! I have not, indeed, Mr. Vandeleur!"

"Why have you not seen her in her own home, if you wished to see her so much?" enquired Vane, in some natural surprise.

"Now, why, indeed? That is the question I have asked myself a half dozen times in the course of this week. I have ridden over to Stormy Point, sir, every morning since I saw her last, but I have always been told that she was not at home. Now, when young ladies of this neighborhood, at this season of the year, go to visit their young friends, they usually stay over night. So, each day that I was told Halcyone was not at home, I naturally supposed that she had gone to spend a day and night with some young lady friends; and, acting upon that supposition, I invariably went, each evening, to the house where I thought it most likely I should meet her. I need not repeat that I have not been successful in a single instance. So, after having returned from an ineffectual effort to see her this forenoon, it occurred to me that a young lady of her spirited nature might possibly go out to spend the day, and then, like one of us, return home late in the afternoon or evening; and so, as my rough-shod horse had fallen lame, from being ridden day and night over such roads as these, I took this horse and started out at once on the venture of seeing Halcyone to-night. And I am very glad to have met you on the way," said Clarence, joyously, holding out his hand.

Vane took the proffered palm kindly, though, truth to tell, he did not feel very glad, under the cirmustances, to have the boy by his side, when they should reach Stormy Point. It occurred to Vane, as it never had occurred to Clarence, that it was just possible little Halcyone was avoiding her visitor.

"But I do not wish to detain you! Go on, and I will keep up with you as well as I can," said the youth, falling back.

Vane Vandeleur bowed, started his horse and flew on

before, followed by Clarence, with a clattering noise and at a reckless speed.

In this manner, and in due time, they reached Stormy Point, Vane being perhaps two minutes in advance of his companion.

"Well, I do declare!" exclaimed Captain Storms, meeting his guest at the threshold of his house, "are you working out by the day for your living, that you go off every morning immediately after an early breakfast, and only come home to sleep? Because if you are, you know, I can offer you lighter labor and higher wages, nearer home."

Before Vane could reply, Clarence Fairlie came clattering up and distracted the attention of the host.

"Well, I'm sure, my boy, 'this is a sight good for sore eyes!' as the old women say! When were you ever at Stormy Point before? Not in a twelve months' time, I'll bet!" exclaimed the captain, heartily shaking hands with his new visitor, after the latter had alighted.

"I have been here every day this week, sir," said Clarence, rather maliciously.

The captain stared in stupidity, muttering:

"Every day this——"

"Week; yes, sir," affirmed Clarence.

"Why, I have been home all the time myself and I haven't seen a hair of your head!"

"Yes, sir; but I always asked for Miss McAlpine, and was always told that she wasn't at home."

"Why what a——! Halcyone hasn't stirred out of the house since the night of the surprise party!" exclaimed the captain, in perplexity.

The countenance of the youth suddenly fell.

"Who on the face of the earth—or at least in these premises—told you she wasn't at home?" demanded the captain, with an air of authority.

"Each and every one of the servants in turn have told me so! Bobadilla, Ailie, and Mary and all!" replied Clarence in a crestfallen manner, for now he began to suspect such answers to his daily inquiries must have emanated from Halcyone.

"Upon my word! Well, come in! come in! She's at home now, anyhow! I'll have this mystery elucidated, if I die for it!" exclaimed the captain, leading the way into the house, which he no sooner entered than he vociferated at the top of his voice—

"Hal.! Ailie! Mary! Bobadilla! Pinky Skinner! Come here! All of you!"

The whole household came rushing to his presence in great alarm, and in the expectation of hearing of some awful calamity that had befallen them.

"Now, I want to know, and I will know, what you all mean by telling this young gentleman, every day, that this young lady is not at home when she *is* at home?" exclaimed the old man, striking his cane upon the ground.

"Them was her own orders!"

"So she told us to say!"

"Miss Hal. said we must!"

Thus simultaneously answered Bobadilla, Allie and Mary.

The captain turned fiercely around upon Halcyone and Pinky Skinner, as if to demand from them a further explanation.

"I know nothing about it! I never have anything to do with such nonsense," said Miss Pinky.

The captain swung around upon Halcyone.

"What do *you* mean by it?" his frown, rather than his words, implied.

"Well, then, guardy, when I wanted to be quiet—and didn't want to see any company, I told your servants to deny me to visitors. They are very kind hearted, and hate to hurt anybody; and so I suppose they took the most tender, if not the most truthful, manner of doing it. Some people, you know, would rather sin their own souls than wound the hearts of other people, however little the last-named may merit such forbearance," said Halcyone, speaking rather fretfully, as she met the eyes of Clarence Fairlie, who looked mournfully and reproachfully upon her.

"Well, my dear, you are certainly very much changed within the last few days. Clary, my boy, it is not only

you, but all the rest of us, who have to suffer from this young lady's whimsies! If you had the ill luck to be her partner at whist for one evening! But Halcyone! seriously, my dear! another time when you happen to have a cramp in your temper, and don't want to see your friends, say so straight out, and don't deal in generalities, and don't leave your unfortunate servants in the lurch with no escape but falsehood. But come! ain't you going to welcome Clary, now that he has had the good (or ill?) luck to find you again?" demanded the captain, turning full upon his ward.

"You don't give a body a chance to do or say anything, guardy," exclaimed Halcyone impatiently, as she moved forward to meet her visitor and offered him her hand.

"Come! Come into the room, Mr. Vandeleur, and leave that girl and boy to make up their quarrel—for I dare say it is a quarrel after all—and follow as they like," said old Tom—leading his guest into the parlor.

"Halcy!" said Clarence, softly and sadly—"dear Halcy! why have you denied yourself to me for almost a week past? Tell me, my love."

She did not answer.

"Tell me, dear Halcy."

She continued silent.

"Why, Halcy, why? Tell me why you have avoided me so constantly," he continued to plead, trying to draw her nearer to him.

"Well, then, if you must know, it was because I couldn't bear to see you—there!" exclaimed Hal., in desperation.

A look of the profoundest pain shot across the boy's face.

"How have I offended you, Halcy?" he gently inquired, dropping on one knee at her feet, taking her hand, and looking beseechingly up into her face.

"By the way you went on that night—frightening me out of my wits, and into all sorts of absurdities!" exclaimed Halcyone, snatching her hand from his clasp.

"Is *that* the reason why you have been so changed within the last few days, as your guardian says you have been? Is that the reason, Halcyone?"

"Well, yes, it is—there!" she cried, jerking herself away from him.

"Well, I am answered. Heaven bless you, Halcyone! Good-bye!" he exclaimed, rising from his knee, and turning to go out. But there was such a white despair in his fair, young face, that, in the midst of her anger, Halcyone was struck with pity and terror. Like lightning she darted after him, laid her hand upon his arm, and exclaimed:

"Don't go, Clary, dear! I didn't mean all I said! Indeed, I didn't!"

He turned, and fixed his mournful blue eyes full upon her, saying:

"Halcyone, it is too true that I cannot live without your love and the hope of your hand! But if you cannot love me, Halcyone—if my hope is your fear, why, then, I could die, Halcyone! I would *rather* die than make you unhappy."

"But I should be very unhappy if you were to die, Clary! I should indeed, dear, for I *do* love you—I do, indeed!" she earnestly insisted, holding on to him all the time, lest he should escape, and do himself a mischief.

But his countenance cleared in an instant.

"You do love me, Halcy?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then what makes you so changeable?"

"I am not changeable, only I'm a capricious little wretch, I suppose."

"I would knock any man down who should say so! You are an angel, Halcyone! a heavenly angel, my love! And oh! since you love me, Halcyone—since you really do love me, tell me when you will make me happy?" he eagerly entreated.

"When will I make you happy? Oh, dear me! I thought I was making you happy now!" exclaimed Halcyone, almost ready to sob.

"No, no, no! only saving me from despair and death!—not making me happy! Nothing but marriage with you will ever make me even content, not to say happy! When will you marry me, Halcyone?"

"Oh, dear—dear me! What sin have I ever committed to be so tormented!" cried Halcyone, wringing her hands.

"Do *I* torment you, Halcyone?" inquired the boy, in a tone of renewed despair; "because if I do——"

"No, you don't, Clary!" she exclaimed, in great alarm. "*You* don't torment me. It's only my own bad temper! You see, it's hereditary in our house. I inherited it from —Pinky Skinner!"

"You have *not* an ill temper! You have a heavenly temper, Halcyone! I'd strike the slanderer to the earth who should deny it. But come, my angel! tell me when you will be my wife?"

"Oh, dear me! don't you talk about marrying, Clary, please."

"Then you do *not* love me!"

"Oh, yes I do! Indeed—indeed, in double deed, I do! But please don't talk about marriage for you and me! Marriage is such a horrid, slow, pokey, dull affair! Oh, dear! it's worse than that! It is loss of liberty—it is prison and penal servitude for life!" groaned Halcyone.

"It is a heaven of bliss to those who love each other," answered Clary.

"Well, but we don't want to go to heaven so young!—at least, I don't Clary, that's the truth! *Marry!* Ugh! Keep house, cut out clothes, measure out groceries, order dinners, scold servants, grow old and cross—ugh! Not yet awhile! Why, Clary, I think the next worse fate to being hanged is to be married! And I don't know but that it is the *very* worst! I wonder any young man or woman in their sober senses ever should deliberately marry! But then, indeed, they never are in their sober senses when they do such fatal deeds! It was said in the old Heathen times that when the Gods wished to destroy a man, they first deprived him of his senses. And I begin to believe it."

"Halcyone, Halcyone! you do not mean what you say! You speak in this unchristian manner because—because you do not love me——"

"Yes, I do, Clary—indeed I——"

"Hear me out. You do not love me—*enough* to marry

me!" He paused, and gazed in her face; but she lowered her eyes, and remained silent.

"Yes, it is true—I see it is true!" he moaned, turning pale as death. "And so I had better——"

"Oh, no, you hadn't better, Clary! No, you hadn't, dear Clary!" she exclaimed, in an excess of terror. "I *do* love you, Clary! Can't you believe me, when I told you so a week ago, and tell you again now? Oh, what shall I do to prove it and quiet you?"

"Consent to marry me! That will prove your love. Do you love me enough to do that?"

"Oh, good gracious! What shall I say? Oh, Clary, how you do worry one!"

"I do not wish to worry you. I only wish a plain answer to a simple question. Do you love me enough to marry me? Yes or no! I do not urge you to say yes; I do not beg you not to say no. I only ask that you will say one or the other, and so forever end this awful suspense."

"Well, and if I should, what then?"

"It would depend upon your answer, what then?"

"If I should say no?"

"I should bow in submission to the answer I had wrung from you, but——"

"Ah, stop! don't go any farther. If I should say yes, for instance, then—would you be——"

——"The happiest man alive? Yes, my angel, I should."

"Oh, I didn't mean that at all. I meant, would you be —willing to wait any number of years?"

"Decidedly not—no, Halcyone, no; if you love me enough to marry me, I shall want you to marry me at once."

"Oh, my good gracious me, what shall I do with this horrid boy?" cried the girl, wringing her hands.

"Only give him a decided answer and he will trouble you no more."

"Oh, dear me, Clary, if you knew me as I really am, you would never want to marry me."

"I do not wish to do so against your will."

"But if you knew me as I am you wouldn't even have me if I was to beg you ever so much."

"Halcyone, don't trifle with a desperate man," exclaimed Clarence, changing color again.

"I'm not. I'm only putting you on your guard. I'm telling you you don't know me. I have a *dreadful* temper to begin with. If I were your wife, I should beat you, Clary. Ask Pinky Skinner."

"If Pinky Skinner were to say you hadn't an angel's temper, I'd—punch Pike Turner's head."

"Poor Pike! that would be very unjust and a trifle dangerous, too, Clary, for the big hunter is just about twice your size and weight. *You?* Why, if you should be so unlucky as to assail him, you would be chawed right up in a twinkling," laughed Halcyone, very glad to divert her lover's attention from the main point, if only for a moment.

But Clarence was not to be put off.

"Don't taunt me, Halcyone—don't taunt me. Answer my question and put me out of my misery, one way or the other."

"Good gracious, I must have the nightmare! I wish I could wake up! I'm not taunting you. I'm telling you what a very bad wife I should make. In addition to being very ill-tempered, as Pinky Skinner knows, I am very stupid. Ask my guardian, if you don't believe me."

"I could not believe any one who should say such things of you."

"But they are true; and, besides being ill-tempered and stupid, I am immoderately fond of lemonade, and I shouldn't wonder if I should take to hard drinking."

"Bah!"

"Oh, it's all very well to say bah, but we have all read temperance tracts enough to know the rise and progress of intemperance—first, may be the victim takes to lemonade, then by easy transition to cider, then to champagne, and then—the thing is done! And how would you like that in me?"

"I'd engage to supply you with all the champagne you would require and risk the consequences," said Clarence.

"You *are* crazy! Well, if all these moral deformities fail to repel you, I wonder how physical ones would act? Now, do you know I am horribly deformed? I am, indeed. My left foot is ever so much smaller than my right one. And——"

"I never noticed it. I thought, and still think, you have the prettiest feet I ever saw."

"Oh, bosh! and that isn't all, Clary—all my teeth were aching the other night, and I have no doubt I shall soon lose them, every one of them."

"Those pretty pearls will last your life, even should you live to be very old."

"*Ah!*" exclaimed Halcyone, with a motion of impatience, "but *that* is not all, either. I'm horridly disfigured. Look!" she said, raising the auburn curls from her temples and revealing a little pink spot about the size of a buckshot. "See what an ugly mark of a red currant I have on my forehead. And that is not half as bad as the black mole on the back of my neck, or the brown one on my wrist."

"Well, granting for the sake of the argument, all you say, still I assure you, my ill-natured, stupid, intemperate, deformed and disfigured love, I will take you if you will give yourself to me. And I must have your answer *now*."

"But stop first. There is something behind that is a hundred times horrider than anything I've told you yet. I didn't mean to confess it, because no one likes to acknowledge such things, but I think you ought to know."

She paused and then, in the most solemn manner, said:

"Clary, I am insane."

"Insane!" echoed the boy, opening his blue eyes to their widest extent, and if he had not himself been in such painful earnest, he must have laughed.

"Yes, Clary, insane, crazy, luny. Guardy, Dick, Harry, Pinky Skinner, all tell me so every day of my life."

"I'll sue the lot of them for slander."

"But listen, Clary, it's a solemn fact. I'm insane—I know I am. I have the absurdest thoughts and do the most ridiculous things. I never pull a flower for fear it will hurt the poor flower. I never roast an oyster, be-

cause to be roasted alive must be such a dreadful death to die, even for an oyster! And I go about in such weather as this and upset all the traps that people have taken so much pains to set for birds and rabbits and such smaller game, because I think it is so base to use our human cunning to entrap the poor little trusting creatures. To say nothing of my always bidding the glorious sun good-morning when he rises, and good-night when he sets, and worshipping him next under his Creator. Now, if that isn't being insane, I would like to know what is?" demanded Halcyone, triumphantly.

"I am not learned in the laws of lunacy, my beloved Halcyone; but I should describe your character of mind as tender, poetic, imaginative, rather than morbid, not to say insane," said Clarence.

"Oh, you are incurable; but *I* believe it to be a very great sin for the insane to marry, and therefore much as I love you, or rather because I love you so much, I would not give you an insane wife."

"Stop!" exclaimed Clarence, with another fearful change coming over his sensitive countenance. "Stop! let me understand. Is *that* a final answer to my question —does it mean—no?"

"No! you dreadful boy! it don't mean—no! Oh, Clary, you'll drive me mad!" cried Halcyone, in an excess of terror for him.

"Does it mean yes?" gasped the boy, pale, panting, breathless.

"Yes! it *does* mean yes. Oh, I wish the earth would open and——"

"Then you *will* marry me?"

"Yes!" desperately exclaimed Halcyone.

"When?"

"Whenever you please. There! In for a penny, in for a pound!" she cried, frantically.

"Come then, my love! Strike while the iron's hot. Let us go in and ask the blessing of your guardian on our betrothal."

And with that Clarence seized the hand of Halcyone,

drew it within his arm and marched her off into the sitting room, where the whole family were assembled.

Leading her straight up to the old captain, Clarence bowed and blushingly said:

"Sir, Miss McAlpine has consented, with your approval, to make me the happiest of men. And I come now to ask your blessing on our betrothal."

This gentlemanly appeal was met by the astounded and staring captain with these memorable words:

"Well, if this isn't a devil of a go!"

Halcyone burst into tears, and would have turned away, but Clarence stood his ground and held her fast.

The other members of the family circle were withheld by delicacy from drawing nearer; but they gave a curious attention to the proceedings.

"Pray, how long has this been going on?" demanded the captain.

"I have loved her so long, that I do not remember when I first began to do so—from childhood, I do believe," answered Clarence.

"Well, I *am* blest! Why, you are nothing but a child still."

"In thirteen months from this I shall reach my majority, sir."

"Majority! bah! that's a great blunder of the law! A man ought not to reach his majority till he's twenty-five!" growled the veteran of three-score. "And you, Miss? Do you want to marry this boy?" he demanded of his ward.

"No, I don't! But he torments me so!" impulsively answered Halcyone, bursting into a fresh flood of tears.

"Then what the deuce do you mean, sir, by tormenting my ward and hauling her up before me in this most outrageous manner?" demanded the old man, turning fiercely upon the lover.

"Do I torment you, Halcyone?" murmured the boy, looking mournfully upon his lady love. And then, without waiting for the answer that she did not seem ready to give, he turned to the captain and with forced calmness answered:

"I beg her pardon and yours, sir. I did not mean to give her pain, or you offence. I told her of my great love and asked her to be my wife, and to give me a simple answer, yes or no. She gave me such an answer. I thought it was a favorable one, and I brought her here to you. I was mistaken. Good day, sir. God bless you, Halcyone," he said, pressing and then relinquishing her hand.

She looked up quickly; saw the expression on his face that always frightened her nearly out of her wits, and then she started up and seized him, exclaiming:

"Don't let him go, Guardy! Don't let him go! I didn't know what I was saying, I didn't indeed! Oh, don't let him go! Oh, Clary dear! stay where you are!" she pleaded, holding him fast.

"For what good? To be tortured to death by your cruel caprices as a mouse is tortured by a cat's claws? No!" he said, struggling to escape.

"What the deuce is all this? Have you both gone mad together?" demanded the captain.

"I don't know, Guardy. I fear so. I know I have. Oh, don't let him go, Guardy! I have hurt him, but I didn't mean it," wept Halcyone.

"Stay where you are, sir!" thundered the captain. "Stay where you are while the lady orders you to do so. And now, Halcyone—do you care for this fellow at all?" he demanded, turning to his ward.

"Oh, yes, indeed I do, sir. I care for him very much indeed."

"I'm sorry to hear it. He's nothing but a boy! And now then! What made you say just now that you didn't want to marry him?"

"Indeed I don't know, Guardy! I'm hysterical, I do believe."

"You are mad, I believe!"

"There!" said Halcyone, drying her eyes and speaking triumphantly. "There! what did I tell you, Clary? Now you hear with your own ears that he thinks I am mad."

"Bosh! You act like a mad woman! But now in

serious earnest. Do you wish to marry that young fellow?"

Halcyone stole a furtive glance at the pale, eager, changing face of her boy-lover, and answered in a low tone:

"Yes, Guardy!"

"You are quite sure?"

"Yes, Guardy," answered Halcyone, very meekly for her, looking out of the corners of her eyes at the eager, impassioned face of her boy-lover, that too surely warned her to give no other answer.

"Well! Heaven's will be done! Elders can not judge for youngers. I had hoped your choice would have fallen on one nearer home, and that you would have been his wife," sighed the old man.

Poor Halcyone! Her choice *had* fallen on that "one nearer home," and she also "had hoped;" but that "Barkis was not willin';" so no more need be said on that head.

"We hope, then, for your kind approval of our engagement," pleaded the lover.

"Clarence, my boy; I have already told you that my views for my young ward had been different; however, as those views have been as illusive as an ignus fatuous, I will not further allude to them. You have won my Halcyone's heart, and her happiness must be my first consideration! I myself have nothing to urge against your betrothal but the extreme youth of both parties—a fault that time is safe to cure; so far as I am concerned, I consent. But there is a more important, if not a more interested, person than myself to consult—Major Hourie! You must not forget that no engagement can be properly formed between you and Halcyone without his consent," said the captain very gravely.

"Sir, I thank you for your kind tolerance of my suit to your lovely ward! And I do not despair of gaining Major Hourie's hearty approval of my choice. I will speak to him on the subject this very night."

"No, no, not to-night, Clary! we can not possibly let you depart in the cold for so long and perilous a ride. You

must stay here to-night," said the hospitable old man, quite blind to the dissenting grimaces of Halcyone.

Clarence, happily as ignorant as the captain on the subject of his lady's will in the matter, thanked his host with an effusion of gratitude, and gladly accepted the invitation.

Vandeleur, however, was almost as ill pleased at this accession of company as was Halcyone herself. He had as yet had no opportunity of discharging the delicate mission confided to him by Father Francis Carroll. And now, with a visitor in the house, he saw no chance of finding one; and yet it was absolutely necessary that this duty which he had promised to do, should be done this night, if ever.

Henry Storms, glad of a young companion for the evening, took the first chance of coming forward and shaking hands with the visitor, and cordially congratulating him upon his engagement to Halcyone—his "own dear little foster sister," as he affectionately called her—knowing all the time, the deep fellow, that he was himself the "one nearer home" upon whom his father had hoped Halcyone's choice might have fallen.

When his pretty speeches were over, he carried Clarence off to a bedroom to get ready for supper. Mr. Dickson went out to see the horses put up; Pinky Skinner left the room to prepare the evening meal; Halcyone flew up to her chamber under the skylights to have a good cry all by herself, and so Mr. Vandeleur and Captain Storms were left alone together in the parlor.

"Well, here is a go!" exclaimed the old man, throwing himself down in his chair and wiping his flushed face so furiously that he inflamed it more than ever. "Here is a devil of a go! If ever I set my heart on anything in this world it was sure to burst up! 'I never had a dear gazelle,' et cetera. Now, if I had one wish left on earth, it was that Halcyone and Henry should become man and wife! And what's the consequence? Harry falls desperately in love with Berry Brooke, whom he never could possibly marry, even if you were out of the question, which of course you ain't. And Halcyone bestows her

foolish little fancy upon that baby boy—baby girl I had better say—Clary Fairlie! To prefer *him* to my tall and handsome stalwart Harry! The girl is absolutely insane!'

"But," suggested Vane, "if Harry did not give her a chance to choose between himself and this now favored suitor?"

"That is true. He did not. He preferred pale Berry Brooke, who has eyes only for *your* black-a-vised mug. Oh, what's the use of talking? All is at cross purposes, and always was, and always will be, with me! 'I never loved a tree or flower but'—it did the regular thing, you know!"

"Captain, I beg your pardon; but as the matter is important, and as some one may come in any minute, I must speak now—" began Vane.

The astonished captain interrupted him.

"Why, what *are* you going to say, that you preface with so much solemnity? Propose for the hand of Pinky Skinner? Ask me to be your groomsman, or what?"

"Something quite as serious, as the subjects you name, I assure you. And yet take comfort, for it is no misfortune that I have to announce. Quite the contrary."

"Well, man alive! announce! Don't keep me in suspense. What is it? Has any eccentric old gentleman died and left me a million of money? Has the President nominated me Secretary of the Navy? Or has—oh, *has* one of the fair widows of Widowville relented in my behalf and determined to deliver me from the dominion of Pinky Skinner? And has she made you her ambassador extraordinary to that effect? And oh! which one is it? Is it the buxom Rosamond, the stately Hortensia, or the venerable Dorothy? 'How happy could I be with either,' et cetera! Na, how happy could I be with *all!*"

"I regret to inform you," replied Vane, smiling, "that it is not my happiness to have the power of announcing to you any such high fortune as you have mentioned. You have not, to my knowledge, inherited a fortune, nor been appointed to a seat in the cabinet; and the widows, I fear, continue obdurate. And at the same time, Captain

Storms, I assure you this is no subject for jesting, and that I have something of the greatest importance to communicate to you, which will greatly surprise and I hope please you."

"Well, man! communicate it! communicate it! Why do you delay?" said the captain, now thoroughly aroused and interested.

"I cannot do so now. It would take more time than we have just now, when some one is liable to enter the room at any moment and interrupt us. No, captain; I wish now only to ask you to break up the evening circle as early as you conveniently can, and remain behind here yourself, with Miss McAlpine; for she also is concerned in this communication. To her and you together I must make it."

"Oh, dear, I'm sure I beg your pardon! I had no idea you were talking secrets, else I wouldn't have intruded. Although I am sure you might have found a more conventional place to talk your secrets in than this common sitting-room, where we want to lay the cloth for supper."

Of course these courteous words could have come from no other quarter than that of the amiable Miss Pinky, who had been standing, nobody knew how long, at the threshold of the door, and had heard, no one knew how much of the conversation that had passed; and, certainly, that part of it which had referred so flatteringly to the hated widows of Widowville, and so obnoxiously to herself.

The culpable, panic-stricken old master had not a word to say in his own defence, so Vandeleur threw himself into the breach.

"I beg you to forgive us, Miss Skinner; but we have done talking for the present; and if the captain will excuse me, I will go up to my room and wash my hands for supper, and so leave this apartment to your entire disposal," he said, good humoredly, bowing and going towards the door.

"No!—No, Vandeleur, take me with you! I must show you the way, you know!" wildly exclaimed the captain, running after his guest. He wouldn't have been

left alone with Miss Pinky, under those circumstances, for the price of the sunken Carrier and all her cargo.

"Ah! you wouldn't run away from one of your precious widows, I reckon. Well! *get* one of them if you can, to come and keep house for you! I'm sure I don't care a snap! *I* could better myself any day!" she called after her victim, as she banged about the chairs and tables with great violence, in setting them straight.

"Oh, Lord! I'll be glad when I'm off to sea again. She'd like to be serving me as she is serving my furniture now! I know she would!" gasped the captain, as he scrambled up stairs after his guest.

"Do you know, Captain Storms, that I have been observing Miss Skinner with some curiosity and interest?" said Vandeleur, as he stood turning back his wristbands before the wash-stand in his bedroom, preparatory to washing his hands.

"Have you? Well I hope it did you good! That's all."

"And I think that all her evil tempers originate in her jealousy of the ladies of Henniker!"

"To be sure they do! Humph! It don't take a wizard to see that! Is *that* all you learned from you observation of my amiable housekeeper?"

"No, for as her ill tempers arise from her jealousy, so her jealousy arises from her love for you!" said Vane maliciously.

"No!" exclaimed the captain, dropping upon the nearest seat, which happened to be an old hair trunk—"You don't mean it! Pinky love me—*that way!*"

"Yes, *'that way,'* " laughed the young man.

But old Tom Storms's vanity was proof armor against ridicule. He never reflected that he was old, sun-burned, weather-beaten, over-fed and over-grown as any prize ox, and so it would never have surprised him to hear that any woman, old or young, homely or handsome, had fallen desperately in love with him; only in this instance he was astonished, enraged, and also very much frightened, that his plain housekeeper should have presumed to do such a thing.

"Good Lord! I wish the women would let me alone!

Am I never to have any peace of my life for them? You —you don't think she means to—to drive things to extremities, do you?" faltered the captain, wiping the streaming perspiration from his face.

"How do you mean?" inquired his laughing companion.

"You don't think she means to—to marry me whether or no, do you?"

"What a question! She can't marry you against your will!" laughed Vane.

"I don't know that! I don't know that! Those women are so desperate sometimes!" exclaimed the captain, furiously rubbing his face. "There was the late Mrs. Storms, now! I don't want to say one word against her, because I have the highest respect for her memory, and I know that she was quite worthy to be my wife; but she married me to please herself, not to please me, bless you! She took a violent fancy to me, and she would marry me, she would, she *would*, in spite of all I could do, and say, and urge, and argue, and beg, and entreat to the contrary. And Mrs. Storms's will was nothing to be compared to Pinky Skinner's will. My young friend," said the captain, solemnly, rising and standing before his guest, "If that woman has set her heart on having me for a husband, she'll do it—she'll do it, sir—and I'm a goner. By the way, is *that* the announcement you had to make to me, which you thought would surprise me and hoped would please (?) me, eh?"

"No," answered Vane, seriously enough now, as his thoughts recurred to the priest's story. "It is something quite different that I will tell you after supper."

"Captain Storms, Captain Storms!" called a sharp voice from below, "*are* you coming down to supper, or are you not?"

"There she is—there she is again. Come down, Vane, my dear boy, for peace sake," said the captain, in much trepidation.

They went down to supper, at which Miss Pinky Skinner presided, with a highly tossed up nose and a discontented and contemptuous expression which was very ex-

asperating; to which Halcyone came, not at all like a blessed bride-elect, but a tear-stained face and a grieved and injured look that was very depressing—at which Clarence sat, not like a favored lover, but with a perplexed look and variable manner, as if he were in doubt whether he really were the happiest or the most miserable man on earth, and feeling tempted by turns to jump up joyously and shake hands with every one around the table, or to steal out quietly and shoot himself: where the captain sat, with the abstracted and puzzled look of one who was revolving several riddles at the same time; and where Vane, Harry, and Mr. Dickson did their best to enliven the whole party.

After the supper—which, by the way, was in itself excellent, as all Pinky Skinner's suppers always were, for

"That's how she ensnared him."

Captain Storms forbore to order out the card-table or to prepare any amusements for his guests, but took an early opportunity of whispering to Ailie to bring in the bedroom candles, and to Harry and Mr. Dickson to make a move towards retiring.

The consequence was that, shortly after ten o'clock, Mr. Dickson excused himself and took up his candle, and Harry followed his example, and offered to show Clarence Fairlie to his sleeping room.

Halcyone only waited for the gentlemen to be clear of the staircase and passages, and then she took up her taper with the intention of flying up to her room in the attic, but, at a signal from her guardian, she remained.

CHAPTER IV.

HALCYONE HEARS ALL.

"Give me you hand, little sister; and let it rest in mine awhile for what I have to say now, concerns you more than any other human being," said Vandeleur, gravely taking the fingers of Halcyone within his own, as he sat between her and her guardian, before the fire.

The wondering girl looked up seriously. He did not keep her long in suspense. Turning to the old man, he inquired:

"Captain Storms, how many years has it been since you drew this precious pearl from the sea?"

"Eh? What pearl? What do you mean?" exclaimed the slow old seaman.

"Halcyone. How long is it since you saved her from the wreck?"

"Halcyone? How long? Lord bless my soul alive. How long has it been, sure enough? Seems like it was only t'other week; but it must have been years ago, seeing how she has grown since that; and recollecting how many voyages she had made with me too! Let me see now. It has been between fourteen and fifteen years! I could tell you to a day, by a reference to my log-book."

"Never mind. We will not trouble you to make any such reference; but in all these years——"

"Now what made you ask me such a question?" interrupted the old man, with much interest, which was shared by Halcyone, who fixed her eyes intently on the face of the speaker.

"Because I meant to follow it up by another one. In all these years have you ever had the slightest clue to her history?"

"Never!" exclaimed the staring captain.

"Nor the slightest suspicion of her parentage?"

"Of course not," said the captain, with his stare still broadening.

"No one's manner towards her has suggested the least idea of relationship? Think, I beg of you," said Vane, earnestly, and feeling very anxious to prepare his hearers for the communication he was about to make.

"Now look here, Mr. Vandeleur. You've heard something about Halcyone's history! Yes you have! I see it in your face! May be that's what Bishop Waldemar had to tell you! Now wasn't it?" broke in the captain, impatiently.

"Indeed, no. Bishop Waldemar knew nothing of your lovely charge. How should he, since he left the neighborhood before she was ever brought to it?"

"Well, if it wasn't he, it was somebody else! You have heard something! I see it in your face!" positively persisted the captain, while Halcyone bent forward, with clasped hands, and eager interest in every feature of her eloquent face.

"Well, well, man, out with it! No beating about the bush, if you please! No breaking of the news, be it good, bad, or indifferent! Blurt it out, if it knocks me down! Have her father and mother turned up, and are they going to take her from me?" inquired the old man, jumping up, and trotting up and down the floor, in his great anxiety.

"No, Captain Storms; she will not be taken from you by another than the devoted lover to whom I believe you have promised at some future time to give her," said Vane, half gravely, half laughing.

"But what then have you found out? What is it?" inquired the old man, with an air of relief.

"I have found out that her father is living—her father only," answered Vane, as he saw the eager, intense expression upon Halcyone's countenance.

"Who is he? Where is he? What is he? Where has he been all this time? How is it we have never heard of him before? Who discovered him now? How came you to know anything about it?" eagerly, earnestly, breathlessly inquired the captain, jumping up and sitting down, rumpling his hair, and rubbing his face, and indulging in other eccentric movements, as he hurried question upon question, in the excess of his anxiety and impatience.

In reply, Vane Vandeleur told the story of Father Francis Carroll, so far as it concerned his daughter and her guardian; but leaving out of it all that was connected with the name and crime of Judah Brakeman.

The old captain heard it through, with many exclamations of "Good Lord!" and "Bless my soul alive!" and "Mercy on us!" and so forth. At the conclusion

of the tale, he remained plunged in profound thought for a few moments, and then said, slowly:

"And so the poor bereaved husband and father took his sorrows so heavily to heart that he left the world and consecrated himself to the service of Heaven."

Vane bowed in silence. He did not think it necessary to add, that remorse and repentance had also their share in driving the penitent for refuge into the sanctuary of the church.

"But when he recognized his daughter in the way he described, why did he not claim her then?—that is the question," said the captain, wonderingly.

"You are not now to learn, Captain Storms, that Father Francis Carroll has long been ill, both in body and mind. He is diseased in body, morbid in mind. He is a devotee, an ascetic, not to say a fanatic. He denies himself almost every earthly enjoyment. It was a part of his self-imposed mortification that he forebore to claim his dear daughter—how much dearer for such self-denial, we may well imagine!" said Vane, gently.

"Ah! yes—that brings to my mind the first occasion upon which he called to see us here. When I presented Hal. to him, he put out his hand to take hers, and as he touched it, he—fainted dead away!—dead away as the weakest woman could! You remember, too, Hal.?" said the captain, appealing to his ward.

Halcyone was weeping silently. Girls, you know, weep on all occasions—when they don't know what else to do.

It was strange. Halcyone, in the beginning of Vane's communication, had exhibited curiosity, deep interest, excessive eagerness; but at its close she showed not the least surprise. She seemed rather to have heard what she had almost expected to hear.

"*You* remember, Halcyone, Father Francis fainted when he first saw you, don't you?" repeated the old captain rather insisting upon an answer.

"Yes, yes; I remember," answered Halcyone, sobbing.

"Well, well, don't cry, my dear. There's nothing to cry about. In the first place, you are going to be a great heiress, you know! Think of that! In the second place, you will not be torn from your old guardian. In the third place, your newly descovered parent will pay you a visit to-morrow morning. And now, Mr. Vandeleur, since Father Francis kept this secret so long, what induces him to disclose it now?" inquired Captain Storms, turning to his guest.

"The precarious state of his own health rendering the settlement of all his earthly accounts immediately necessary; and also the advice of Father Ignatius and Bishop Waldemar," replied Vandeleur.

"But you, Halcyone!" said the old man, turning to his ward. "How quietly you take this most astonishing piece of intelligence. One might have thought you would be overwhelmed with astonishment; instead of which you only weep a little, and look as if you had known it all along, but was a little sorry that it should come out now. Now how is this?"

"Guardy," said Halcyone, "I didn't know it all along. Nor even surmise it as it really is. But dear Father Francis had a wistful way of looking at me many times, that made me think he knew more about me than anybody else did. My deep reverence for him kept me from mentioning the matter of my impressions, either to him or to any one else. But I thought about it a great deal, Guardy. And thus it happens that I am not so much surprised as *I* had expected to be."

"So, so," muttered the old man, "I suppose the good priest could not always keep a guard over himself; and thus he betrayed the interest he felt in her," said Captain Storms, pointing to Halcyone, but addressing Vane Vandeleur.

"It would have been impossible for any man of his temperament, under such circumstances, to have done otherwise. The wonder is that he had not betrayed himself to others as well as to Halcyone," answered Vane.

Well, the story was told, the fire was nearly out, the

clock had struck twelve, and the three were quite tired enough to go to rest.

Why then did they linger around the darkening hearth, still talking?

Because when people have received a very startling piece of information, and even after they have heard all its details and discussed it in all its aspects, they cannot at once compose their excited spirits or resign themselves to repose, however much they may be in need of it.

So it followed that Captain Storms, Vandeleur and Halcyone remained seated around the smouldering fire, talking of the wonderful revelation that had been made them and of its probable bearings upon the prospects of all concerned in it, until the advent of the "small hours."

At length, however, Captain Storms yawned like the opening of a great trough at sea, raised himself up, looked at the clock in the corner, announced that it was half-past two and sent everybody off to bed.

When the family met at breakfast next morning, Halcyone looked pale and heavy-eyed; Captain Storms gloomy and abstracted; Clarence Fairlie ill at ease, and Miss Pinky Skinner exceedingly cross, because she didn't understand what was the matter. As at supper on the previous night, however, Dick, Harry and Vane tried to make up for the bad spirits or bad tempers of their companions by their cheerfulness and amiability.

After breakfast the boy-lover succeeded in frightening his unwilling sweetheart into a private interview and into renewed protestations of regard and fidelity, and then, more than well satisfied, took leave of the family and departed, leaving Halcyone in a flood of angry tears.

Vane Vandeleur, following a secret inspiration that showed him what Father Francis Carroll's unexpressed wishes would be in this matter, remained at home to await his arrival and speak some words of encouragement to him, before the invalid should pro-

ceed to his exciting interview with his daughter and her guardian.

At ten o'clock Father Francis Carroll arrived. By a previous understanding with Captain Storms and Halcyone, Vane Vandeleur received him alone, told him all that had passed on the previous evening, and assured him of the ready welcome, the warm sympathy, the true affection he would meet with from his daughter and her guardian in his newly revealed relationship to them. Then Vane administered the glass of wine he had ready as a restorative, and waited the will of Father Francis.

"May you bring my daughter to me here—here alone? I would see her so at first," faltered the poor priest.

"Certainly; it is most natural and proper that you should do so," answered Vane, as he arose and left the room.

In a few moments the door opened and Halcyone entered alone. She came in slowly, softly and reverently, and knelt at the feet of her father and took his hands and bowed her head upon them and covered them with tears and kisses.

The priest dropped his head over hers and wept. And then, as soon as he could speak, though in broken tones, he said:

"My child, you have heard from Mr. Vandeleur what I am to you?"

"Yes, yes, my dear father. I have learned all that now; but *not* now have I first learned to love you. I have loved you all along, dear, dear, dearest father," sobbed Halcyone.

He raised her to her feet and pressed her to his heart for an instant; but when she threw her arms around his neck and pressed her cheek to his, as she sobbed upon his shoulder, he put her gently away from him, saying:

"Such caresses are not for me, dear child. We must deny ourselves all that. I must deny myself."

And he made her sit down by him on the sofa, and

exercising much self-control, he talked to her very quietly of that beautiful young mother who mortal frame had perished in its youth, but whose soul was now among the angels in Heaven. Halcyone listened tearfully but serenely and even happily. So they sat for several hours, content only to be near each other, until at length the priest remembered the master of the house, the preserver of his daughter's life, the adopted father of that daughter, and he said to Halcyone:

"Go now, dear child, and fetch Captain Storms here."

Halcyone got up and went out and soon returned with the stout old seaman, who advanced with extended hands and cordial tones, saying:

"Come now, let me warn you, Father Francis, not to let us have any nonsense or sentiment. I'm very glad that Halcyone has found her father and that you have found your daughter!"

"A happy event that would never have happened if it had not been for you! Oh, my friend! oh, my friend! one of the most painful features in my forbearance for years past is that it forced me to be silent on the subject of my deep debt to you. Even now, how can I sufficiently express the profound gratitude I feel to you?"

"There, there, there, there. None of that I say. Didn't I, in the very beginning, particularly request you that there should be none of that? What have I done that the most selfish man wouldn't have done in my place?"

"Saved my child's life and supported and educated her at your own cost," the grateful father was trying to answer when the old sailor continued vehemently:

"If the most selfish brute that ever lived had found a treasure, would he have picked it up and taken care of it? That's all I did. Bosh! it was nothing."

"It is every thing for her and for me," essayed the priest.

But his words were again arrested by the captain, who continued, impetuously:

"It was nothing I say—nothing. I have done nothing for the child that she has not repaid me a thousand and a thousand times over. Bless her!" said the old man, laying his hand upon Halcyone's head. She has been the light and joy—yes, and the *goodness* of my own life. What should I have ever done without her?"

"Ah, I am glad to hear you say that. I thank Heaven that she whose life you saved and has since sustained has been some comfort to you—to you her more than father," said the priest, gently.

"Well, so am I," frankly admitted the captain. "I'm not going to be jealous and selfish over it at all either. I'm right down glad that you have found a daughter in her, and, consequently, that she has found a father in you. And I would rather that she would have found one in you than in any one else, for *you* will not take her away from me—unless, indeed," added the old man, as a sudden panic of fear blanched his face,—"unless you mean to make a nun of her—which Heaven forbid! You'll not make a nun of her, will you, Father Francis?" he inquired, in an imploring tone.

If anything could have called a smile to the sad face of the priest, it must have been just such a ludricrous distress as the old captain's countenance now expressed.

"I shall not make a nun of her, or remove her from your guardianship, or in any way interfere with what I consider your indisputable, undivided right to decide her destiny," answered Father Francis.

"There, there—none of that now, you know. I claim no such rights while you live, sir——"

"You have well earned the authority of a father over her, and have a claim upon her filial love and duty."

"Oh, bosh! Hal. loves me and I doat on her. But her first duty in life is, and shall be, to you."

"You were the preserver of her life, the guardian of her youth—you are——"

"——The old water-dog that fished her up out of the

sea, and has stood over her ever since to keep the wolves away. 'Behold all!' as the French say."

"Well, Heaven bless you! You will not even receive my grateful acknowledgments," sighed the priest.

"But I will receive your blessing with reverence and gratitude, holy father—and there! let us say no more about it."

Halcyone got up, put her arms around her old friend's neck and kissed him tenderly, and then she slipped away. It was to order luncheon to be prepared for Father Francis Carroll's refreshment after his long ride.

When the table was laid Halcyone returned, and Vandeleur rejoined them.

Father Francis partook very sparingly of the broiled squabs, dried toast, and coffee provided by Pinky Skinner, and soon arose from the table, and spoke of his departure.

"I am going over to St. Rosalie by appointment to see Bishop Waldemar. Let me have the pleasure of driving you," said Vane.

"But my horse?—I thank you very much, Mr. Vandeleur, but I came here on horseback and must not leave my horse behind," answered the priest.

"Oh, as to that, Father Francis, you can let Bobadilla ride your beast back, while you travel in an easier manner in the sleigh with Vandeleur. And when the young gentleman returns, the old servant can come back with him," put in Captain Storms.

"But that would inconvenience——"

"—Nobody," exclaimed the captain, cutting short the priest's words, or rather finishing them in his own way.

Thus it was finally arranged.

Father Francis took leave of Halcyone and of all the family at Stormy Point, and climbed into his seat in the little sleigh beside Vane Vandeleur, who drove him swiftly and smoothly to St. Rosalie, followed at

a short distance by Bobadilla, mounted on the priest's old slow-and-sure white pony.

They reached St. Rosalie in good time for the Fathers' mid-day meal.

But easily as the short journey had been performed, it had exhausted the strength of the invalid priest, so that Father Francis was obliged to retire to his dormitory.

Vane Vandeleur went into the parlor to inquire for Bishop Waldemar. Here he found only Father Bonhomme, who told him that the venerable bishop had gone over to Henniker to call on his old friends, the Widows of Widowville, but that he had promised to return to dinner.

And in fact Bishop Waldemar arrived in time to join his holy brethren and their guest as they sat down to table.

"I have an invitation for you, my young friend," said the bishop, turning to Vandeleur. "I am myself invited to dine at Henniker to-morrow, and the ladies, learning that you would be here to-day, commissioned me to ask you to join us. You will come?"

"Most certainly, with great pleasure," heartily responded the young man.

Soon after they arose from the table, Vane took leave of his hospitable entertainers and, attended by Bobadilla, started for Stormy Point, where he arrived in time to help the old captain beat his adversaries at whist.

CHAPTER V.

WILL IS FATE.

"GOING out for another day's work?—But, no; you've got your Sunday rigging on. Going out for a holiday, I should say? Bless us and save us! Quite *point-de-vice*—armed *cap-a-pie* for conquest!" exclaimed old Captain Storms, as he met his guest the next morning in the sitting room.

Vane only laughed, and took his seat.

"Whither away, then? can't you tell a body? crossly inquired the old captain.

"I am going to dine at Henniker, by invitation," answered Vane, smilingly.

"'Dine at Henniker,'—humph! humph! And 'by invitation'—humph! humph! humph!" growled the captain, in a dissatisfied tone, that brought another smile to his guest's face.

"Yes; there is to be a small impromptu dinner party in honor of Bishop Waldemar, who arrived only yesterday and may leave to-morrow."

"Humph, humph, humph, humph, a dinner party at Henniker and I left out! It never happened before when I was on shore! Never! There must be some mistake! What do *you* think, Mr. Vandeleur?"

"I do not think there was any mistake," said Vane.

"But there *must* have been, I tell you! And they'll have—Goodness, gracious me! what *won't* they have for the dinner! Why, Madam Journey would almost roast or boil herself for Bishop Waldemar! And I not invited! I'm *sure* there's some mistake, Mr. Vandeleur."

"I'm quite sure there is not, sir," insisted Vane, maliciously.

"But I tell you there *is*. The ladies would never have left me out. They never did it before. They have forgotten me this time!" persisted the captain, growing excited.

"I do not think it was that, sir! I do not think they forgot you," said Vane, wickedly.

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Vandeleur?" Do you mean to insinuate that the Widows of Widowville have purposely slighted me—ME?" demanded the captain, drawing himself up.

"No, indeed, I mean to insinuate nothing of the sort, but yet I feel sure they did not forget you for all that!"

"Then why haven't I got my invitation, that's where it is! If they didn't forget me, they sent me an

invitation. And, if they did send it, I suppose the good-for-nothing messenger was too lazy to fetch it! I wish I had the drowning of such, that is all!"

"But, Captain, I am sure you do your imaginary messenger deep wrong."

"What the deuce do you mean, sir? Would you persuade me that the ladies of Henniker have neglected me—ME? And, of course, if they did not forget me, and if the messenger did not fail in his duty, why they must have purposely neglected me, since I have received no invitation!"

"All your premises and inferences are equally and totally wrong! The ladies did not forget you; nor did their messenger fail in his duty; nor yet did they purposely slight you. In proof of which, behold!" said Vane, laughing, and producing from his pocket a folded note.

"*Ah! you rogue!* you rascal! you young dog! You had it all the time! Why didn't you give it to me last night?" demanded the delighted captain.

"Because I hadn't it in my possession last night, nor until within the last half hour."

"How's that?" inquired the captain, opening his note.

"Why, as usual, I took a short walk in the bracing air before breakfast. I met Euripides at the outer gate. He was coming to the house with this; but he asked me to take it, as it would save him half a mile's tramp, and he was in a hurry to reach old Mr. Basil Wall's family, where he was going with another invitation."

"Ay, ay! They will get theirs even later than I've got mine! but they'll go! bless you, they'll go! An impromptu dinner party! almost a surprise! all the pleasanter for being a surprise!" chuckled the captain as he read Madam Journey's note.

A very informal little note it was, merely stating that the party had been got up in a hurry to honor Bishop Waldemar by bringing his old friends and parishioners together that they might meet him be-

fore his departure, which might be the next day, or very soon after, and begging Captain Storms to come with all the family, and without ceremony, on so short a notice.

"Bless 'em, I knew they'd never forget me!" exclaimed the enraptured old man. Then he called aloud for Halcyone, and told her of the invitation, and ordered her to be ready by ten o'clock, for at that hour he meant to have the old carry-all at the door to convey the whole party to Henniker.

Halcyone was punctual, and the captain was as good as his word, and at a quarter past ten the whole family set out for Henniker, where they arrived at twelve. In the front yard they saw several other carriages that arrived with guests, who had entered the house. There was the old chaise from St. Rosalie, which had brought the bishop and Father Bonhomme; there was the ancient coach from Hourie Hall, with the major and the young men; there was the big feed wagon full of young folks from Basil Wall's.

Passing through all these, our friends alighted and went into the house where they were met by old Euripides, who showed them into the drawing-room, where the Widows of Widowville warmly welcomed them, and where they found all the guests, with the exception of the Walls, assembled. The Walls had not yet come down from the dressing-room.

Now, I am not going to dwell upon the details of this dinner-party. Perhaps I have already in the course of this story described too many of them; yet as I am writing of a very hospitable and convivial people, I do not see how I could have helped it. I shall tell you of only one incident, which is worth mentioning from the circumstance that it was destined to affect the happiness of Berenice and Vane.

Vane had paid his respects to all the elders of the family, had shaken hands with the bishop and the priest, and had made his way to his lady-love, and greeted her warmly in low, love-tuned tones, and glances none saw beside, when suddenly Berenice gave

a little start and exclamation of surprise and delight, fixing her eyes upon some distant object.

Vane, rather astonished, followed with his eyes the direction of her glances, and saw coming towards them one of the very handsomest young men he had ever beheld—smiling, eager, delighted, as seemed Berenice herself.

A pang of jealousy sped through the heart of Vane! Unreasonable, all things considered, but then—when ever was jealousy otherwise?

As the stranger came on, Berenice actually stepped out two or three paces to meet him.

"Oh! Basil! what a surprise! I am so delighted to see you! When did you arrive?" she exclaimed, giving him both her hands.

"Why, only this morning! I reached my uncle's house some half hour after your messenger, who brought the invitation to the family, had left. And so—longing to see you as much as I did, I took the liberty of coming with my sister, although I was not named in their card," said the young man, gayly.

"You 'took the liberty,' as if it *were* or *would* be a liberty for you to come to see us on any day, at any hour, of any possible occasion! Oh! I'm so surprised and delighted to see you! Have you seen grandma?"

"Oh, yes! both the grandmas and the mamma too! and kissed them all. Ain't you going to kiss me, Berry?"

Berenice drew back. "No," she answered; "we are no longer children, Basil!"

"Ah, well! I must submit I suppose, but it is hard after one has come from a three years' voyage!—But Berry," he inquired, in a lower tone, who is that brigandish looking fellow, with the sallow complexion, who is scowling at us so fearfully?"

Berenice turned and started with dismay at the expression upon her lover's countenance. Apparently, she instinctively divined the cause. Recovering herself with much self-possession, she smiled and answered:

"A very near and dear friend of ours, Basil; come, and I will introduce you to him."

And taking the young man by the hand, she led him up to Vane, and said:

"Mr. Vandeleur, this is Midshipman Basil Wall, a brother of Fulvia and Flavia, and a great grand nephew and namesake of our old neighbor, Mr. Basil Wall."

Good gracious! how stiffly Vane bowed, and stepped back without touching the offered hand of the frank young sailor.

"Basil, I told you Mr. Vandeleur was a very near and dear friend of ours. And now I must tell you more. He is my betrothed," said Berenice, perceiving and touching the very heart of the difficulty with her direct honesty.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the youth gayly. "Is that so? Sir, will you allow me to congratulate you?" And he frankly held out his hand again.

How ashamed Vane felt for himself and his jealousy as he took the offered hand and shook it warmly, replying:

"I am very happy to meet any friend of Miss Brooke."

"And he is such an old, old friend, Vane," added Berenice.

"He does not look extremely aged," laughed Vane, now in perfect good humor.

"He is just my own age," said Berenice, smiling brightly on the visitor. "We were brought up together, like a pair of twins; knew each other before either of us can remember, in the first year of our lives, I believe, used to drink from each others' cups, bite each others' cakes, slap each other in the face and tear each others' hair, when we fought for the place on mamma's lap, or old Mr. Basil Wall's knee; for you must know that, in those early days, the sea-side here was considered too bleak for me in the winter-time, which mamma and myself always spent at Mr. Wall's farm; but in the summer our place was con-

sidered so healthy, that little Basil and his two elder sisters, Fulvia and Flavia, were always sent to us. Poor little Basil, you see, was an orphan from the first week of his life; I think that is one reason why we all loved him so much," added Berenice affectionately.

"So you see, Mr.—Mr. Bandoline——" began the young sailor.

"Vandeleur," amended Berenice, rebukingly.

"Well; you see, Mr. Vandeleur, by what she has told you, that Berry and I spent our childhood and youth together, until I was made a middy of and sent to sea; and this is the first time I have been home since I went away. Berry and I having been brought up together, I cannot help but think of her as a little sister, and I know I never shall be able to look on her in any other light."

Perhaps Vane would have liked to have cultivated his jealousy, but he could not do it; in the full light of the young sailor's frank smile he was ashamed of his doubts.

"I hope you will always look upon my fair betrothed as your little sister," he said, cordially. "Ah, my fair betrothed who tells me plainly that she will never be my bride!" sighed the young man to himself.

While this conversation was going on at one end of the long drawing-room, and while Mrs. Dering and Mrs. Brooke was receiving the guests at the other, Bishop Waldemar and Madam Jernyngham were closeted together in the ladies' little morning parlor.

There he revealed to her the identity of saintly Father Francis Carroll with the sinful Judah Brakeman. He told the story precisely as the penitent himself had told it; but then he dwelt much upon the deep remorse that had embittered the life and wasted the health of the sinner, and upon the sincere repentance and self-devotion to good works that had atoned, if human effort could atone, for the sins of his youth. Finally, he told her of the father's recognition of Halcyone as his lost daughter.

During the latter part of this story, when surprise followed fast upon surprise, the old lady sat breathless, dumbfounded and motionless with astonishment. Yet as soon as she found the use of her tongue, she contradicted her silent manifestations by exclaiming:

"Well, I'm not astonished! You expect me to be so; but I'm not. Any one who has lived out the three score and ten years as I have, and seen as much of the ups and downs of life and wonders and revelations of time as I have would be an idiot to be astonished at anything! But how amazed the parishioners will be to hear all this!"

"I think, Madam, that they need not hear all this! It would do no good, and probably much harm. The identity of Francis Carroll with Judah Brakeman had best not be made known to any one except to those immediately concerned in the matter, as yourself and your family."

"I think you are quite right, Bishop," agreed the old lady.

"His relationship with Halcyone of course must be divulged. There will be no harm in that! He is not the first man who ever lost and recovered a child, or the first widower who ever became a priest, by many scores."

"No! but what a nine days' wonder it will be to be sure!"

"Yes, it will! And so far a boon to this dull parish," smiled the Bishop.

"But it will be very disagreeable to that sick and sensitive man to be made a nine days' wonder of; to be talked about, stared at and questioned!"

"He will not be subjected to such annoyance. It is a part of my business here to get him away from all that distresses him here and have him attached to my mission at Rome?

"Oh, how kind it is of you to think of that! How very kind! But it is like you, and I hope it will benefit our poor friend," said Madam Journey, fervently.

"I think it will. Travel, change of scene, friendly

companionship and good counsel may do much to cure the sickness of mind and body under which he suffers. But, Madam," said the bishop, lowering his voice, "am I right in judging from your words, that you have forgiven Judah Brakeman in Father Francis Carroll?"

"Judah Brakeman!" exclaimed the old lady, with a look of pain and anger; "I never saw him in my life to know him! He was never more than a dreadful name to me! Even the name has been dead to me, forgotten by me years ago. Father Francis Carroll I have known and loved and reverenced for three years past; I cannot at all identify him with the other man, whose name I beg you will never bring up to me again!"

"That is enough! That is the true forgiveness! You not only forgive the sinner, but bury, blot out the very memory of his sin! But, my dear Madam, will Mrs. Dering and Mrs. Brooke, who must be told of this matter, feel and think and act as you do?"

"I trust they will—nay, I am sure they will," said Madam Journey.

"And now, Madam, there is another serious subject upon which I wish to talk with you—this foolish love affair between my young friend, Vandeleur, and your grand-daughter," said the bishop, gravely.

"Ah, you may well call it a foolish love affair," sighed the old lady.

"I call it so, because there seems not the slightest probability of their ever either uniting or dividing."

"Ah, there it is!"

"But how is all this to end?"

"Ah, who can tell? They love each other truly. We all like the young man. We are willing that he should marry our child. Even I, who held out longest against it, for his sake, would give my consent now, since I see he is so ardently desirous of marrying her and taking the consequences; but Berenice herself refuses to accept the sacrifice, as she persists in calling it."

"That is lamentable. Can she not be influenced?"

"No. To silence all importunity, to shut out all false hope, she has bound herself by the solemn vow never

to marry Vane Vandeleur until those impossible conditions are fulfilled, which, according to the Indian oracle, would make the marriage safe."

"And can Berenice, a young woman of the enlightened nineteenth century, be enslaved by any such superstition? Can she believe in it?"

"I don't know whether she believes in it or not—I doubt whether she herself knows whether she believes in it or not. She eludes all confession of such a belief while acting upon it, by admitting that the fate which has followed our family may be a mere chain of coincidences; but vows most solemnly that she will never expose her lover to the danger of becoming another fatal link in that yet unbroken chain."

"Then, since they can never marry, they should separate," said the bishop, firmly.

"Ah, my good sir, they will never do that. He means to settle down in this old neighborhood for the sake of living near her."

"He must not do it. She must not permit him to do it," said the bishop, positively.

"Ah, Father, he will not go. Nor will she let him."

"Then she does not know the depth of her own selfishness."

"She is not selfish, Father. She believes that she acts for his happiness as well as for her own."

"But it is for neither. Madam, you know what life is. You know that those young people who love each other, yet cannot wed, should part."

"Yes, I *do* know it. But oh, Bishop Waldemar, what is to be done? The sudden separation would kill Berenice," exclaimed the old lady, wringing her hands.

"The separation need not be sudden. It can be graduated until they become reconciled to it."

"But how can that be manged?"

"I have thought how; I will ask Vane to go with me to Rome. I will entreat him, if necessary, to do so. He cannot refuse his old spiritual father. You must make a point of it with her. She cannot refuse to release him for a season, as his absence is to be so short.

This course will break the spell. Afterwards they may be brought to look upon their parting as permanent. Do you consent to this course?"

"Oh, yes, Father Waldemar, I consent; but oh! deal gently with my Berenice!"

"I will indeed! I will do everything for her happiness and welfare."

"I am sure you will."

"And now, Madam, may I commission you to tell Mrs. Dering and Mrs. Brooke all that I have told you about Father Francis Carroll? and to do so at the first favorable opportunity?"

"Yes, certainly; I will tell them to-night, after the company have gone home."

"Thank you. And to-morrow I will commence operations upon my young friend, Vane. And now, as we understand each other, Madam, I will not detain you longer from your other guests," said the bishop, rising.

They re-entered the drawing-room, which was now all alive, with the low voices and silvery laughter of the young people.

Ernest Blackistone and Clarence Fairlie were both dancing attendance upon poor Halcyone, who was bored almost to death by them; but by wonderful effort she kept up her spirits and talked gayly and equally to both young men, while they covertly scowled at each other.

Fulvia and Flavia were closely attended by Harry Storms, who kept up with them a continual fire of banter and repartee.

Berenice stood as we left her, between her lover and her friend, chatting with and charming each in his degree.

Mrs. Dering was in conversation with Father Bonhomme.

And Mrs. Brooke was accepting the stately old-fashioned gallantries of Major Hourie with much graciousness.

The entrance of Madam Jernyngham with Bishop

Waldemar slightly disturbed this gentle social scene.

The bishop went around, shaking hands and renewing acquaintances with old friends whom he had not seen for years; and Madam Jernyngham passed among her guests, welcoming those who, coming late, had entered the drawing-room during her conference with the bishop.

The morning was passed in pleasant conversation, enlivened occasionally by music.

Dinner was served at the usual early hour, and answered even the extravagant expectations of the great gourmand, Captain Storms.

After coffee, the guests departed, having enjoyed a day of much happiness.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LOVER'S SACRIFICE.

Bishop Waldemar was deeply loved and venerated by all the ladies of Henniker, as well as by his sometime ward and pupil, Vane Vandeleur. He was almost safe to carry any point with either of them all. His point now, was a very prudent one—it was to separate those lovers who could not or would not marry.

First he began to work upon the young man.

On the very day after the dinner party at Henniker, he went by appointment to see Vane Vandeleur at Stormy Point.

He was received by the boisterous old captain, who took him into the best parlor, where a fire had been lighted for his accommodation, and where the host would have kept him in conversation by the hour, had not the bishop politely explained that he wished to see Mr. Vandeleur on business.

Whereupon Captain Storms left the room in search of Vane, whom he found solacing himself with a cigar while he paced slowly up and down the long back porch—to

the extreme disgust of Miss Pinky Skinner, whose back kitchen opened immediately upon that domestic sanctuary.

Vandeleur hurried at once to the presence of his venerable friend.

"You wished to see me alone, Bishop?" said he, after he had bent his head in reverence and shaken hands with his visitor.

"Yes; did I not tell you that I should call to-day?" inquired Father Waldemar.

"Certainly; but I understood that you would come sociably to see us all."

"So I have; but I have also some little private business to discuss with you alone."

"Oh!" exclaimed Vandeleur, with an uneasy thought of Berenice, as he sank upon his chair.

"Yes; it is this—Vandeleur, I wish you to go to Rome with me," said the bishop, electrifying the young man with the words.

"'To Rome,' with you, Bishop!" he echoed, in a sort of consternation.

"Yes, my son. I shall have no companion on my long journey, except Francis Carroll, who as an invalid in mind and body will, instead of being a help to me, be a great hindrance. I shall require some other companion —some one who is attached to me and to whom I am attached; one, also, who is as free from family ties as I am myself. In this wide world, who is fitted to fulfil all these conditions but yourself? Who loves me more than you do? Whom do I love as much? Therefore, I have decided on entreating you to go with me."

"Father," answered Vane, in a low voice, "were I indeed as free to go with you as you seem to suppose, I would very gladly do so. Every consideration, save one, invites me to accompany you. I would like to be the companion of your journey, wherever it might tend. And above all things I should like to go with you to Rome. But I may not do so. I have pledged myself to my beloved Berenice—I beg your pardon! to Miss Brooke, I ought to say—to remain here. Since I cannot be her

husband, I have promised to be, at least, her friend and neighbor."

Now the wise and good bishop did not answer, as he might have done. "Such an arrangment between you and her is unprecedented, is preposterous, is dangerous to good morals, and being so is very sinful!" since he felt that to have answered so would have been quite useless to a lover who was resolved to devote his life and soul to the will of his beloved. So, having fully expected this and no other, and being entirely prepared to act upon it, throughout the affair, he only said:

"Is this so? I am very sorry. But, of course, I feel that you cannot act otherwise. You cannot accompany me much as my age and infirmities requires your companionship."

"I also am very sorry," answered Vane.

And, indeed, he not only felt regretful, but also a little compunctious; though, of course, he had no cause for self reproach; only it is *sometimes* difficult for the best men to separate regret from remorse.

"—Unless, indeed," added the bishop, "Miss Brooke should release you from your promise."

"I can never ask her to do so," answered Vandeleur.

"No, I see—of course you cannot; so no more need be said on that subject," admitted the wise old man.

But he knew full well that Berenice might be brought *unasked*, to release her lover from his rash vow.

"I hope you do not, from this, doubt my great attachment to you, Father Waldemar?" inquired Vane.

"Of course I do not, my son. But the object of my visit is now done with. I must return to St. Rosalie. You know that I leave the neighborhood on Monday next?"

"No—I did not know."

"Yes, I do. Francis Carroll goes with me. As yet, no part of his most strange story has transpired. I hope it will not until after we have left this place—I shall expect to see you before I leave, Vandeleur."

"Most certainly you will see me. To-morrow, Thursday, I am bound fast for a ducking expedition with Cap-

tain Storms and his party. Next day, Friday, I shall go to see my friends at Henniker. And from that place, in the evening of the same day, I will go to you at St. Rosalie, and if permitted, will remain with you there until you depart on your journey."

"Thanks! thanks!—that will do very well. Of course you will not only be permitted, but joyfully welcomed to stay at St. Rosalie, not only so long as I shall remain, but long afterwards as you shall like," said the bishop joyfully, rising—for his plan was now not only prepared, but as good as assured of success.

"You are not going?" inquired Vane.

"I only came for a call," answered the bishop.

"But I assure you the family expect you to spend the day and dine with them, and they will be cruelly cut up if you do not. The captain's estimable housekeeper, I know, is preparing a most unprecedented dinner in your honor," he added, smiling.

"But I had no idea of any such thing," laughed the bishop.

"Still, if you have no positive engagement elsewhere, it would be kind to stay here," urged Vane—"but I will call the captain to speak for himself," he added, suiting the action to the word and going in search of their host.

The captain soon burst into the room like a blast of wind, and made so boisterous an opposition to the visitors' stirring from the house that the bishop, from the first nothing loath, consented to remain.

No one enjoyed harmless good-fellowship more than did Father John Waldemar. During the long morning he played a game of chess with Vane Vandeleur, took a walk with Captain Storms, and even tried his hand at shooting ducks upon the wing against the whole family party.

The "unprecedented" dinner was served at two; and it did great credit to Miss Skinner, and was well relished by the venerable bishop and his entertainers, all of whom had gained good appetities by their brisk morning exercise in the open air.

Shortly after dinner, Bishop Waldemar took leave, and started for St. Rosalie.

Bishop Waldemar had his full share of the indolence attendant upon age. When he reached his roost at St. Rosalie, he rested until late the next morning.

Then he rode the well-known "priests' pony," the common property of the pastors and the common ranger of the pastures, of the parish of St. Rosalie, over to Henniker House, with the avowed purpose of spending the day with the ladies there.

He was warmly received by Mrs. Jernyngham, who conducted him in state to the long drawing-room, which, since his arrival, had been always kept aired and warmed for the reception of the bishop, should he chance to call.

"Well, madam," began Bishop Waldemar, when he had bowed and accepted the seat offered him by Madam Journey, "Well, I have discharged my commission."

"Successfully," anxiously inquired the old lady.

"Fully as much so as I had expected," smiled the bishop.

"Then he will go with you?"

"Nay; he expresses much willingness to go with me, since I make so strong a point of his doing so, and since the absence is to be but temporary; but he pleads against my request the pledge he has given Miss Brooke to remain here."

"Of course Berenice must release him from that pledge," said the old lady.

"And of course she will," added the bishop. "You mentioned the matter to her, madam?" he inquired.

"Pardon me; no. I fully intended to do so last night, but, upon reflection, I thought it was better to wait until I should see you to-day and hear from yourself that you had made your intended request to Mr. Vandeleur; better, in short, to be able to state to Berenice that you *had* asked Mr. Vandeleur to accompany you, than that you intended to do so."

"Upon second thoughts I think you were right, Madam; for now you may tell her not only that I have requested Mr. Vandeleur to be my companion on my

journey, but also that nothing but his pledge to herself prevents his doing so. Tell her this, and I know she will be the first to voluntarily release him."

"That she will."

"He comes by appointment to-morrow, I think?"

"Yes, he does."

"Then, be so good as to tell her to-day. And when she sees him to-morrow she will at once speak of this subject, and set him free for a few months. Nay, if necessary, Madam, you must urge her to do this. It is a matter of the utmost importance that these young loving hearts, who cannot, or will not wed, should part, and part at once," said the bishop, most earnestly.

"I feel it is! I know it is!" exclaimed the old lady, clasping her hands.

The bishop, having performed his errand, arose to take his leave; nor could any hospitable pressing on the part of his hostess prevail on him to prolong his stay. He had an engagement, he said, that obliged him to leave her now; but he would come again before he should start on his journey.

Bishop Waldemar had no just cause to dread that Berenice Brooke, would need any "urging" to induce her to release Vane Vandeleur from his promise to remain in the neighborhood. As soon as she understood the merits of the case, as it was discreetly presented to her, and was made to believe that Bishop Waldemar, in consideration of his age and infirmities, required the attendance of his young friend on his journey, and that their absence would occupy but a few months, at the end of which they would return to the neighborhood, Berenice at once offered to release him.

"You know, dear grandmamma, if his absence were to be a permanent one, or even a very prolonged one, I *could not* tell him to leave me and go! I *could not*, grandmamma! It would kill me to do it, or to have him obey me! But for this short, or temporary absence, and for the purpose of attending dutifully upon his old preceptor, I cannot refuse! I cannot, although I know it

will wring my heart to part with him even for so brief a season," she said, as the tears rushed to her eyes.

"That is my brave and generous girl! Send him away upon this pious mission, and have faith enough to believe that no sacrifice was ever made for duty that did not bring its own reward," said Mrs. Jernyngham, earnestly.

The next day—when Vandeleur came to spend the day with the ladies of Henniker—Berenice Brooke took an early opportunity of speaking to him about the projected voyage. Laying her hand on his shoulder, she said, sweetly and gravely:

"Vane, I have heard that Bishop Waldemar needs your companionship on his long journey. Dear Vane, you must go with him! It is my duty to send you, and yours to go."

"But, my dearest Berenice, the parting will half kill us both," he answered, gazing fondly into her eyes.

"Oh, no, it won't!—not even me!—weak as my heart is! We can bear a great deal, when we know it is our duty to bear it," she replied, smiling.

"You say that! But you say it with pale lips, my love!" he murmured.

She smiled. Ah! who has not seen such a smile on patient woman's face—a smile, sad, weary, but hopeful.

"I shall feel the separation, Vane, temporary though it is to be. I shall feel it; so will you. I would not try to make you believe otherwise; but I can overlive it; so can you, because it will be for duty's sake."

"My own dear Berenice, if this is going to distress you so much, I will not leave you," said Vandeleur, tenderly.

"But it would distress me much more to have you refuse your kind old friend, who needs you so much; it would, indeed, believe me. Nay, really, I would join my prayer to his request, and implore you to go with him," said Berenice, earnestly.

"Then, my love, I go; but it is at your behest alone! And I shall count every day, from the moment I leave you, lost, until I see you again! Meanwhile, you will be true to me, I know."

"True as truth, dear Vane! And you!—you will be sure to come back and remain here?"

"As Heaven hears me, I will, if I live! If I come not, dear Berenice, dear love, be sure that I no longer live," said Vandeleur in a low, deep tone, as he bowed his head over her hand.

Thus the separation, that both believed would be only temporary, was arranged between them. Father Waldemar had his own wise, wilful way.

The bishop also came to dine at Henniker that day. After dinner Vane informed him of the change in his purpose, brought about by the voluntary act of Berenice, in releasing him from his pledge to remain in the neighborhood.

And the bishop, who had, indeed, expected nothing less, was very warm in his praises of the disinterestedness and dutifulness of his young friends.

That evening Vane Vandeleur took a respectful leave of the ladies of Henniker, and a tender leave of Berenice, and went to St. Rosalie, to spend the night with Bishop Waldemar.

The next day he spent in a rapid round of farewell calls—at Hourie Hall, at old Mr. Basil Wall's farmhouse, and finally at Stormy Point, from which he had brought his effects to St. Rosalie. Of course, he reserved Henniker House for his very last leave-taking; and he spent as much as possible of the intervening time in the company of the Widows of Widowville and his beloved Berenice.

At length came the dread day of parting. The ladies of Henniker were very kind and considerate to their youngest descendant and her lover. They permitted Berenice to drive, under the chaperonage of Mrs. Jernyngham, to the village of Henniker, and there to see the last of the departed travellers.

Ah! it is not the parting hour that is the most painful in separation. While our beloved is still with us, though about to go, we do not realize all; while the parting kiss is still warm upon our lips, we hardly believe that he is gone. We go home, indeed, with full knowledge and

with a heavy heart-ache; but we almost expect him to meet us at the threshold and console us. It is in the days and hours that ensue, when he comes not back; when, still with the heavy heart-ache, we involuntarily listen for the loved, familiar step—look up for the loved, familiar form, and—suddenly realize the truth. It is in the waking up in the morning to the renewed—keenly renewed consciousness of separation! Oh, no; it is not in the parting hour; but in the first days and hours which follow it, that the separation is most intensely felt. Afterwards come use, habit and hope—the feeling that every day now lessons the length of absence, the looking forward to the return home and the happy reunion.

Even so it was with Berenice Brooke and her lover.

They parted in the crowded, busy stage office, scarcely feeling that they did part.

He was happier than she. He went off to new scenes, unassociated with any memory of her; and though he loved her well, he suffered less than she did. She returned to Henniker House, scarcely feeling that he was really gone. Nay, she even supped well, and passed the evening so pleasantly, that her loving relatives congratulated themselves on her cheerfulness and argued the very best for her future happiness. She slept well also; fatigue lent its blessed aid and sealed her senses in slumber; and Madam Journey, who could scarcely believe in the fact, often arose in the night and stole to her bed-side to see how she fared, and to be inexpressibly relieved by listening to her low, regular breathing that proved her deep, refreshing sleep.

"She will do well. She will do very well indeed," said the kind old lady to herself, as, after having anxiously watched Berenice's sleep through nearly all the night, she resigned her own aged frame to rest.

Ah! but Berenice did not do well. Though it was not until the next morning that the full force of the blow was felt by her. She awoke at first with the impulsive joyousness natural to her youth; but she was almost immediately sensible of a dull, vague heart-ache. Something had happened? What was it? Quickly and cruelly

came the flash of memory, almost slaying her with its severity.

This glorious new day, that brought new light and life to the world, would bring only dark and deadly loss to her. This bright day would not bring her lover as usual to her side. No—it would take him farther from her; and every day, for many days, would take him farther and still farther from her!

Oh, dreary days! Oh, dreadful distance! Oh, heavy time of absence! Oh, broad and boundless ocean that must soon roll between them! How could she bear to think of them!

Ah! if the time could be passed in utter unconsciousness! even in temporary death! instead of in this keenly sensitive suffering life! this dreary sense of loss, this deep regret, this unceasing, this helpless, this wild, insane longing to cleave the air as with eagle's wings and fly over the ocean to the side of her lover, or in this utter sense of helplessness, this intense despair that tempted her to cast herself upon the ground and howl, and tear her hair in desperation!

Yet she did nothing of this sort.

With all her mental agony, she exercised much self-control. She appeared before her friends, pale indeed, but with much composure.

Had she given more way to grief, perhaps it would not have worn so much upon her.

As it was, she grew paler and thinner day by day. Her eyes lost their brilliancy and her step its lightness. Any one to have seen her but one week after her lover's departure, would have supposed that some fatal physical malady was preying on her young life.

Now, also, the full meaning of the "malediction," real or imaginary, forced itself upon her mind. She could never marry her lover! She had herself said so, many times, and she knew and felt that she really could never, never marry him. She had not cared for this so much while he was with her, for his frequent presence satisfied or, at least, consoled her; but now she felt this prohibition as the most dreadful doom! She brooded over it

day and night, and fell into the deepest melancholy, while health and strength faded fast away!

And to make her fate harder at this time, the letters which he should have written to her from New York, before the sailing of the steamer, and which he really did write, by some untoward accident never reached her; so that she suffered still more from suspense, anxiety, and disappointment than she should have done.

But she suffered nothing from *doubt!* She never for an instant suspected his fidelity! "Why *doesn't* he write?" Madam Journey would impatiently exclaim, as she saw the heart-broken look of her grandchild.

"He *has* written, grandma, but the letters have been lost, and it cannot be helped," Berenice would confidently but mournfully reply.

The public papers first informed them of the sailing of the "Western Star" for Havre, from which point the voyagers were afterwards to take ship for Rome. In the list of passengers were the names of Bishop John Waldemar, the Rev. Francis Carroll, and Mr. Vane Vandeleur.

Berenice read the announcement silently, and then passed the paper to Madam Journey, saying merely: "They are gone," and went out of the room.

Rosamond Brooke arose to follow her daughter, but Madam Journey prevented her, by saying:

"No, do not disturb her, Rosy!"

"Let her have her cry out to herself. It will be better so."

It proved to be better so. Rosamond resumed her seat at the work-table, where she was rejoined by her broken-hearted daughter, who seemed somewhat calmer than before.

The ladies of Henniker grieved very much over the sufferings of their child, especially when week after week had passed and she grew no better. She grew worse, in fact.

They did everything in their power to restore her to cheerfulness, but in vain.

"Dear child, don't grieve so much," said Madam Journey, tenderly; "it is but for a little time."

"It may be—*forever*, grandma," drearily answered the girl.

"Tut, tut! even I, old as I am, shall live to see him come. Every day now brings nearer the day of his return! And then!—but, my darling! then you must marry him! I see that you must not be separated any more—you too! You must marry him as soon as he comes back. You must trust in God, defy the devil, and—malediction or no malediction—you must marry him!"

"No, no, no! grandma! I can die—I feel that I *shall* die, that I *am* dying; but I cannot doom him to death! While the malediction—true or false—holds good, I will never mary him! I swear it by all that I hold most dear and sacred! And my resolution is as fixed as fate!" replied Berenice, firmly and gloomily.

"Ah, Heaven! ah, dear Heaven! what have we done to deserve this? Berry! Berry, my darling child, bear up—do not give way to this despair! bear up for the sake of us who love you so much!" wept the old lady.

The tears of old age—they are very touching! Berenice felt them to be so; and, in another moment, her arms were around the old lady's neck.

"Dear grandma—dear, dear, true friend!—I wish I *could* 'bear up' for your sake. But I cannot—I cannot. dear. Some spring in my bosom is broken, and there is no elasticity there. But take comfort. Life is so short, thank Heaven! And you and I who love each other so much will soon be in the 'better land' together," she said, amid many caresses.

"Oh," sobbed the old lady, "it is dreadful to hear you—you who were so young, and bright, and beautiful, talk of happiness only in the next world. Ah, Berry, my darling, don't—don't talk so again!"

Berenice was silenced, but she continued to caress the old lady until Madam Journey, who *would* attend to her household duties though the heavens should fail, went out to speak to her cook.

The ladies tried the effect of company upon their melancholy daughter. They invited her young friends to the house, and Fulvia and Flavia Wall, with Halcyone Mc-

Alpine came for a long visit. These young ladies attracted their own especial admirers, and Harry Storms, Ernest Blackistone, and Clarence Fairlie, and young Basil Wall were frequent and welcome guests.

They had riding parties every fine morning, and dancing parties every evening fair or foul.

To please her family and her young friends, Berenice entered bodily into all these amusements, but spiritually into none of them. Sadly and silently she rode with the gay young equestrian troop in the mornings. Like a ghost, she glided through the dance in the evenings. Nothing seemed to do her any good. Her young friends looked at her in wonder and in compassion. Her strange engagement with her lover, which was never intended to end in marriage, had not been made public—so her companions knew nothing about that. And though some of them suspected the attachment between herself and Vane Vandeleur, not one of them ascribed the deep depression of her spirits and the rapid failure of her health to its real cause—incurable grief for the absence of her lover.

Of all her young companions who noticed her dejection, Midshipman Basil Wall was the most observant and the most anxious about Berenice.

He too, knowing from her own lips of her betrothal to Vane Vandeleur, though not knowing of her fatal resolution—never, except under seemingly impossible conditions, to complete that betrothal in marriage—partly, but not wholly, surmised the cause of her sadness.

He saw that it was occasioned by the absence of her lover, but he did not see that it was deepened by the constant reflection that her lover—even if he should return—could never be her husband.

He would have done anything in the world to make Berenice happy. One morning he said to her:

"Darling Berry, don't look so dejected. There is nothing in life worth looking so wo-begone for. Things that are beyond remedy are said to be beyond regret; while things that are not beyond remedy should be remedied at once. Now, dear sister, you are grieving after your

betrothed—grieve no more! I have six weeks' leave—this is only Wednesday of the second week. Say the word, and I will start this evening—reach New York on Friday evening,—jump on board the Liverpool steamer on Saturday morning,—and go to Europe and fetch your lover back in a months' time! For when I shall tell him that you are weeping for him, if he is a man—as your betrothed must be—he will come back with me at once. Now, say the word, and I am off—only say the word, and I am off."

"You dear, good Basil! You that have just returned from a three years' tedious cruise! You would go upon the wearisome sea again, and spend all your land leave in my service?" she exclaimed, in a wondering sort of gratitude.

"Indeed I would, Berry darling! indeed, you know I would, little sister! I would spend all my land leave to go over the sea again and fetch your lover back to you. Only try me! Only say the word! Only prove me what I would do for your happiness!" he fervently pleaded.

"Oh, you dearest, best Basil! I think your's must be true friendship, if there is such a thing in this world! But, brother, this case is beyond your help!" she began.

"No, no! no, no! You don't know *what* I can do, if I try! I'll bring him back in a month's time! I will, indeed! You don't know *what* I would do for you!" he vehemently interrupted.

"But, dear brother, you are altogether mistaken! I am almost ready to thank Heaven that such a sacrifice as you offer is not possible for me to receive! Listen to me, dear Basil——"

"But why not? But why not?" he impetuously demanded.

"Because, dear friend, in a month's time, whether you shrould go for him or not, he will be here, according to his promise," she gravely explained.

"Then, dear Berry! since so short a time is to reunite you, why should you be so cast down? Why, how soon a month will pass!"

"Brother Basil, I will tell you, though I am *tacitly*

almost sworn to secrecy! It is because, though he is my betrothed—whenever he shall come, I may never marry him!"

"Never marry him! Then why are you betrothed?" very naturally inquired the young midshipman.

"Of course because we love each other! And our betrothal does not so much mean that we shall ever marry each other as that we shall never either of us marry any one else!"

"But I do not understand—if you love each other so much, why you may not marry each other?" exclaimed the young midshipman in bewilderment.

"Dear Basil! Although, as I said, I am *tacitly*, almost sworn to secrecy—I will tell you."

And here Berenice looked him gravely in the eyes and inquired:

"Do you know my mother is a widow?"

"Why, of course," answered the young man, wonderingly.

"And my grandmother also?"

"To be sure."

"And my great grandmother?"

"Certainly! they are all three widows! And, being all three so, their place has come to be called Widowville, and they themselves the Widows of Widowville. Truly, I knew all that, Berry dear! But what has all that to do with you and your betrothed?" inquired the young midshipman in astonishment.

"Everything to do with it! But first I must tell you that not only are *my* mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother widows; but that my great-grandmother, Mrs. Jernyngham's mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, were also widows."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; and not only has each one in her day and generation been widowed, but widowed in the first year of her marriage, and generally by the violent death of her husband."

"Is that so? Is that really so?" inquired the young man.

"It is. You yourself know it in the three last instances, since they are historical! You know that Captain Jernyngham was killed in a sea-fight eleven months after his marriage. That Colonel Dering fell in an Indian skirmish some ten months after his nuptials. And that my dearest father, Mr. Raphael Brooke, died of illness brought on by a violent shock some six months from his wedding day."

"Oh, yes; I knew of all these things; but I never thought of them before. And even now, I cannot see what earthly connection they can have with your destiny and that of your love."

"They have everything to do with it, as I said before, Basil."

"I do not undertsand how!" exclaimed the young man.

"In illustrating the tradition, that for the great crime of our first colonial ancestress, the curse of early widowhood was laid on her and her daughters forever."

"My Heavens! what is this you tell me? I never heard anything like it in all my life before. I cannot believe in it even now."

"Nor I, perhaps. Yet I cannot deny—and you cannot —that the women of Henniker *have* been widowed in the first year of their marriages, from the days of the first colonial lady of the manor down to the present."

"Mere coin——"

—"Basil! if you utter that word I will never forgive you! I have heard it *ad nauseum*. Let me tell you the dark story of our house and then leave you to judge," said Berenice, solemnly.

The young midshipman bowed in silence, and Berenice began and told the family tradition.

"Well," said young Basil, bluntly, as soon as the tale was told. "I don't believe it."

"You don't believe it!" echoed Berenice, half angrily, for the old family legend had now a solemn interest for her and she had in it a sort of tragic pride. "You don't believe it!"

"No, not one word of it. Oh, it is a very interesting story, you know. Do first rate to tell by the fire of a win-

ter evening or in the middle watch out at sea. But it's a bouncer for all that!"

"Oh, Basil!"

"Oh, come now, Berry! Your old tradition isn't as sacred as the thirty-nine articles of Christian faith, is it, that you should feel so about it? It's a bouncer, I tell you."

"But, Basil, we *know* that all the women of the house for the last six generations have been widowed in the first years of their marriage."

"Well, that may be true enough, but it was a mere chain of coin——"

"Basil!"

"Well, there, I won't use the objectionable word; but I'll give you the same meaning, in other words, however, if I die for it. And I'll say *it just happened so*, and because it just did happen so, somebody in your neighborhood with a turn for romancing invented the tradition to account for the widowhood. Don't tell me! The very idea of such a thing! Ridiculous! Berry!" laughed young Basil, partly because he did not credit the story and partly to rouse and reassure his adopted sister.

"I wish your view were the right one," sighed pale Berenice.

"It is the right one! I wish you had eyes to see it! Have you told Mr. Vandeleur about this?"

"I have not; but he has been told."

"Well, if his big, dark eyes tell the truth, he is not the sort of man to give up his love for fear of death! Why, look here, Berry! I'm eighteen years old, and I've been in love twenty times, I do believe, and——'

"Oh, you absurd child! you were never in love in your life!"

"Well, then, I have fancied myself in love at least twenty times in my life! And *every* time, I would have dared ten thousand deaths for the sake of the girl I fancied myself in love with! Now, if I would have braved so much for a passing fancy, what would not that fierce, brigandish-looking young man brave for you?"

"Anything, Basil, that I would ask or permit him to

brave! But he shall not dare an early death for my sake! I do not mean to be the Seventh Widow of Widowville!"

"Well, then, Berry, if he cannot persuade you out of that notion, or you can't be persuaded out of it, I don't think much of your mutual affection!" said Basil, shortly, for it made him almost angry to know that his foster-sister was made so wretched, by what seemed to him a foolish superstition.

While they were still talking in the deepening twilight, near the bay-window of the long drawing-room, old "You-Rip" entered to replenish the fire, light the lamp, and close the shutters.

When he had done all this, a whole bevy of young people entered, talking, laughing, and proposing games of all sorts.

Apparently, they could not agree upon any. They were tired of all, each that had been proposed had been played so often. At last, Midshipman Wall jumped up, exclaiming:

"Oh, I tell you—I had nearly forgotten it, but when I was over at the village this morning, I saw a book of oracles—a sort of fortune-telling affair in prose and poetry—a really well got up thing. I thought you'd all like it, and so I bought it, and brought it home—here it is!"

And he drew from his pocket a little Christmas gift-book of oracles from standard writers.

"Oh, let me see it!"

"Oh, yes, let us consult the oracle!"

"Have our fortunes told!"

Such was the burden of the chorus raised around the happy possessor of the book.

"If you all talk together, you know, I can't derive that pleasure and improvement from your conversation that I might otherwise do." expostulated the young man, waving the book above his head.

Whether it had the effect of a magician's wand I do not know, but it quelled the storm. The laughing girls fell away, leaving the midshipman possessor of the field.

"Now, then, Fulvia—you are the oldest and the biggest—you mount that tripod (meaning the three-legged music-stool), and we will form a circle around you, and consult you, and you are to deliver the oracles from this book, according to the laws you will find laid down on the first page."

Laughing Fulvia took the seat and the book, and her circle of anxious inquirers formed around her.

Berenice, rather from courtesy than from any real interest in the childish game, joined her young guest.

The first question put by the giddy girls was the very important one—of what manner of man each was destined to marry.

Halcyone, who sat nearest on the right hand of the Priestess, was the first inquirer. She drew her number at random and, almost trembling, waited until Fulvia referred to the corresponding page and paragraph.

The answer delighted Halcyone, and disgusted Clarence. It was:

"Single as a stray glove!"

Berenice was the next in order.

"What shall be my destiny?" was the question she carelessly put.

Then she drew her number, and waited until the oracle was consulted.

"Thou shalt be wedded, widowed, and childless in a year!"

A slight scream startled the company. All her carelessness was over. Berenice had fainted!

It was but a trifle—that mimic oracle, to have her swoon; but it must be remembered that Berenice was really ill, and weak in body and mind; she was extremely nervous and excitable; in that morbid state of melancholy and despair when the over-stimulated imagination "dreams, dreams and see visions," and finds omens in everything.

Her swoon, however, was not a serious one. A few simple remedies restored her to consciousness. She smiled sadly, apologized for her weakness, and entreated her young friends to go on with their game.

But that was not to be thought of. Soft music was substituted for all other entertainments.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIVALS.

WHILE honest young Basil Wall was doing his best to comfort and encourage Berenice Brooke, at Henniker House, other actors in this drama were busy with other interests elsewhere.

First, Father Francis Carroll had no sooner left the neighborhood than the story of his early marriage with the Highland heiress, his subsequent shipwreck, with the loss of his wife and children, and the late discovery of his lost daughter in the person of Halcyone McAlpine, was promulgated through the parish.

The news was not forced upon the people, but passed about quite naturally in this way:

Father Bonhomme, in his parish calls, would be questioned as to how Father Francis Carroll's health was; why he had gone away; and when he was coming back.

And he would answer by telling the story of the priest's youthful marriage, disastrous shipwreck, loss of family, the sorrow that led him to the service of the altar, and, last of all, his recovery of his daughter.

Father Bonhomme did not think it expedient to confess the sins of his brother to the whole parish, deeming *that* a matter between the repentant sinner and his Maker.

But much the people wondered and gossiped. Old men forgot politics and market prices, and young men forgot sport and play in the discussion of the nine days' wonder. Old women and young girls canvassed the subject in all its bearings around their tea-tables or work-stands.

Many of the most rigid of both sexes were highly scandalized at the idea of a priest ever having been married at all; no matter how early in his youth, or how short his married life had been; how soon it had terminated, or

how long an interval or probation and preparation had elapsed before the repentant widower had been admitted to serve at the altar.

These cavilers had to be reminded that Saint Peter himself, whom they claimed to be not only their first priest, but their first pope, had been a married man, since it was on record that his "*wife's* mother lay sick of fever."

But the priest's story, so far as it affected the position and prospects of Halcyone McAlpine, had much influence upon the action of Major Hourie.

When that impetuous young lover, Clarence Fairlie, first went to his guardian with the tale of his passion, and his matrimonial projects, the stately old master of Hourie Hall, whose pride was equal to his poverty, utterly scouted the idea of such an ill-sorted marriage, and notwithstanding the habitual gentleness and courtesy of his nature and manners, he gave the infatuated young gentleman such a "blowing up" as would have done credit even to the gusty powers of that boisterous old sailor, Captain Storms.

And Clary had retreated from the presence, sullen, crestfallen, but determined to have his own way in spite of his guardian, and everybody else on earth.

Little Clary, to his credit be it written, was incapable of mercenary motives; from the first to the last he had been honestly, and as he thought, incurably in love; and he would have married Halcyone, no matter who or what, as to mere family and fortune, she had turned out to be.

Neither had Major Hourie any personal dislike to the lovely young girl; that she was nameless and penniless was his objection to her as the wife of his favorite ward.

And now, when from the united testimony of Father Ignatius and Father Bonhomme, he learned that Halcyone McAlpine was the heiress of a Highland castle, with a rich landed estate lying all around it, with forests, fields, fisheries, a properous tenantry, and "all that," his ideas on the subject of her marriage with his ward underwent a complete revolution. He saw at once that his impoverished young nephew could not form a more desirable alliance than the proposed one with the rich Scotch

heiress; and he now became as anxious for the match as he had once been opposed to it.

He had another talk with Clary about it. He told him that his objections to the marriage were all removed; and not so much by the discovery of Halcyone's great fortune, as by that of her high family.

"For you know, my dear Clarence, that we have never yet had a 'blot on our 'scutcheon.' In all our poverty and privations we have preserved the purity of our lineage. So, I never would have consented to your marriage with Miss McAlpine while her family was unknown. Now, however, my dear boy, I bid you go in and win!" said the old gentleman, gaily.

But Clary was still sulky, and he answered, very undutifully:

"I'm glad you're pleased, sir; but I should have married Halcyone anyhow; I meant to have done so all along; even if I had found out that her father was a gipsy and her mother a beggar! It wouldn't have been her fault, and I should have married her all the same!"

"Ugh! You are only fit for a lunatic asylum!" exclaimed the old gentleman, in disgust.

But while Major Hourie was encouraging his nephew's wooing, others were plotting against its success.

These plotters were no others than the beautiful brunette, Fulvia Wall, and the fair little bride-elect, Halcyone McAlpine.

You see, although Master Clary had set all authority at defiance, and declared his own independence and his fixed determination to marry Halcyone under all circumstances, yet, nevertheless, he *had* felt a little discouraged, under the united influences of his uncle's angry opposition and his betrothed bride's sulky coldness; but now that his uncle bade him, "go in and win," he felt highly stimulated to do so; and thus, with more assiduity than ever, he devoted himself to Halcyone, who sometimes resented such constancy by tears and hysterics.

Fulvia Wall saw the persecution of Halcyone by her desperate boy lover, and wondered equally at the devotion of Clary to his cold sweetheart and her dislike and im-

patience of his attention. For beautiful Fulvia, with all the wealth of her glorious young womanhood, loved the fair, effeminate boy, and marveled greatly that he should be so fatally infatuated with careless little Halcyone, and that she should be so stupidly blind to his attractions; for to Fulvia he was "altogether charming."

Halcyone had not the slightest suspicion of Fulvia's secret love for Clarence. Halcyone fairly worshipped Fulvia as the most glorious beauty the sun ever shone upon, as much superior to her (Halcyone) as that same sun to a tallow taper. It was Halcyone who had first given the beauty the title of "Queen" Fulvia. And the idea of her majesty loving such a little "whipper-snapper" as Clarence Fairlie, had it ever been presented to Miss McAlpine, would have been laughed to scorn.

But as the persecuted bride-elect of Major Hourie's nephew had, once before, made Miss Wall the confidant of her perplexities, so now—being incapable of keeping her troubles in her own overcharged heart—she poured them into the bosom of that sympathizing friend.

And this was the way of it:

One fine afternoon, as Fulvia sat reading alone before the little wood-fire of her own chamber, at Henniker House, Halcyone suddenly burst into the room, exclaiming:

"I shall go raving distracted, Fulvia—I shall indeed!"

"Why, what is the matter, dear?" anxiously inquired Miss Wall—hurriedly laying aside her book, and looking up.

"It is that abominable little devil, who was born to make me miserable!" cried Halcyone, throwing herself into an arm-chair opposite her friend, and bursting into violent hysterical sobs and tears.

Fulvia watched her in silence for a few moments while the storm somewhat subsided, and then she calmly inquired:

"Is it of Clarence Fairlie you are speaking?"

"Of course it is—you know it is! Of whom else could it be? Horrid little brute—I wish I had never set eyes on

him! I—I hate him more and more every day of my life!"

"Then why not tell him so, and be rid of him once for all?" pertinently inquired Fulvia.

"Because he is *such a fool.* He threatened to make way with himself, Fulvia—he did, indeed! And, you know some donkeys actually do such things—and he is just *such* a donkey. And, upon my word, I have sometimes thought it would be just as well to let him do it. Only, you know, I never *could* bear to see anything die—even a drowning fly! If there is anything in this world that goes through my heart like a knife it is the bare idea of death. Indeed I have often let the rats out of the trap, to Pinky Skinner's deep disgust and furious anger. I couldn't bear even to see a destructive rat killed, much less—much less—one whom I had known and played with ever since I was a baby, and always liked until—until he took it into his absurd noddle to fall in love with me," cried Halcyone—her bright face sparkling with angry tears.

Fulvia watched her a little while longer, and then again calmly questioned her:

"How far has this gone between you?"

"This—what?" flashed Halcyone, half angry even with her friend.

"Flirtation, courtship, engagement, or whatever it may be?"

"It has gone as far as ever it *can* go, short of actual, horrible, downright, mad marriage!—and I haven't *half* promised that now, I have *wholly* promised it! There! what do you think of that?" sobbed the little victim of her own pitiful heart.

Fulvia covered her eyes with one hand, and slightly averted her face as she answered reproachfully:

"I did not think you could have done *that,* Halcyone hating him as you say you do?"

"I was regularly *bated* into it!" exclaimed Halcyone, desperately jerking at her bright chestnut curls, as if she would have jerked them out by the roots.

" 'Bated into it?' " echoed Fulvia, incredulously.

"Yes, I was," cried Halcyone, with another jerk at her ringlets.

"Well, don't tear all the hair out of your head about it, but tell me how it happened."

"Why, of course in the very same manner as at Hourie Hall that night."

"But, my dear, couldn't you have kept out of his way?"

"Didn't I try to do so for a whole week? You'd better believe I did! After he had frightened me so terribly at the surprise party—frightened me into half promising to be his wife—ugh!—you may judge I avoided him as if he had been a wild beast——"

"That delicate, sensitive, high-tuned nature!" breathed Fulvia.

"Oh, high-tuned fiddlestick! I wish I had the tuning of him! I'd take him down, I bet," snapped Halcyone.

"Since you scorn him so much, it is strange you should have promised to marry him. I wonder why you did it?"

"Am I not trying to tell you, if you would let me?"

"Go on."

"I say I kept out of his way, as I would have kept out of the way of a raving maniac, for a whole week, and would have done so forever if I could. I told the servants to deny me to him. And they not having the moral courage to tell him the truth, told him every time he called that I was not at home. And then the detestable little idiot went about inquiring for me all over the neighborhood among our mutual acquaintances, and getting me talked about.

"What next?"

"Well, things went on just that way, until one day when he came he was met by my guardian instead of the servants. And then the game was all up. Guardy blurted out the whole truth, regardless of consequences. Not only told the little ape that I was home then, but that I had been home the whole week. And then he blowed up the whole household for lying and drove them all from his presence and flung himself out of the passage, leaving me to settle accounts with my furious little lover!" exclaimed Halcyone, breathless from excitement.

"What then?" inquired Fulvia, leaning her rich damask cheek so low upon her hand that all her dark-brown ringlets fell forward, half veiling her beautiful face, as she gazed furtively at her hysterical companion.

"What then? Why you might almost know without my telling you. When the desperate little demon found out that I had purposely avoided him, he went into such a state of mind as terrified me out of the little senses I had left. And I couldn't compose him at any cost less than my liberty. And then and there he made me promise positively to be his wife. And without waiting a single instant for me to recover my breath or dry my eyes, he hauled me right up before my guardian to ask his blessing on our betrothal!"

"Well?"

"It wasn't well! It was ill as it could be. Guardy stormed like thunder. And I—holding tight on to my little lover's hand, had to beg and pray Guardy to be mollified and to give us his blessing just as if *I* wanted to marry the little devil! And all to keep him from doing something desperate."

"What next?"

"And since that he claims all the privileges of an engaged lover, coming to see me every day, no matter where I may be staying, keeping close by my side, following me up and down the house and grounds, never leaving me at peace for a single moment and almost driving me distracted by talking to me of the bliss of our future married life! The more I dislike him the more he likes me; the more I don't want to marry him, the more determined he is that I shall do it!"

And here Halcyone paused for want of breath, while Fulvia, still leaning low on her hand, remained in silent thought. At length the beauty lifted her head and said:

"I see how it is now, Halcyone! I understand it all perfectly well, now! *It is his nature.* I have heard and read that in some natures *opposition* is the fuel to the fire of their love, without which the fire would die out. Now you are constantly feeding the fire of this boy's love by opposition. Although you have consented to be his wife,

you oppose his love in every way. If he comes and sits down by you, you shrink from him; if he looks at you, you turn away your face; if he takes your hand, you snatch it from him."

"Of course, I do! I must! for if I were to give him an inch he would take an ell! If I were to let him fondle my fingers, he'd want to kiss me next. And I know if he were to try to kiss me, I'd bite him!"

"Now, Halcyone, if you wish to be rid of your troublesome suitor, I advise you to change all your tactics!"

"How?"

"Instead of letting him hunt you, do you hunt him! instead of flying from him, turn upon him; instead of feeding his fire with the fuel of opposition, fight fire with fire!"

"I don't understand."

"I'll make you. Instead of leaving him when he comes to sit down by you, retain your seat; and if he rises and goes away, follow him up. If he takes your hand, hold on to his till he gets the cramp. If he slips it away, seize it again and tell him he don't love you at all, or he wouldn't take his hand away! Do by him as he has done by you—follow him up, hunt him, harrass him, be jealous, be exacting, be irritable! Don't let him look at any other woman! Let everybody know that he belongs to you. Quarrel with every girl that so much as looks at him! Especially quarrel with me; for you know *I* shall understand it and not take real offence. Now, do you comprehend the plan of the campaign?" inquired Fulvia.

"Oh, perfectly!" exclaimed Halcyone, drying her tears and laughing. "I will begin operations this very evening, and even if it don't succeed, it will be such fun! But, Fulvia, you must help me! You must play into my hands!"

"Oh, I will."

"You must give me cause to quarrel with you."

"I'll try to do so; but you needn't wait for a cause. You are to be jealous, you know, and 'the jealous are not ever jealous for a cause; they're jealous that they're jealous.'"

"Oh! it will be such fun! such fun!" exclaimed Hal-

cyone, clapping her hands for glee—"even if it shouldn't succeed," she added.

"Do not doubt," said Fulvia, confidently, "our plans will be sure to succeed."

Halcyone resolved, not only to follow her friend's advice, but to go beyond it. She determined to dress and behave in a manner that would be sure to shock her lover's fastidious taste, at the same time that she would seem to be very fond and very jealous of him.

She commenced her experiment on her victim that very evening—not rudely, not suddenly, but gently and gradually.

Before going down to tea, she combed her curls out straight and plastered her hair down with stiff pomatum—a style which was extremely unbecoming to her, and which made such a complete change in the character of her countenance that one could scarcely have recognized her for the same bright beautiful fairy. Then, instead of wearing her brilliant tartan dress, she put on an ugly, pale brown merino, with a large stiff white collar, and cuffs; and clothed in this severe, uncompromising fashion, she went down into the drawing-room, and took her seat at the tea-table.

Her young companions, and even the ladies of Henniker, looked at her in surprise, and as for Clarence Fairlie, he gazed on her in consternation.

Halcyone affected to take no notice; but seeming to be quite absorbed in herself, she took everything that was offered to her, and soon had her little plate piled with a heterogeneous mess of toast, biscuit, muffin and cake, ham, fish, sweetmeats and jelly. And she picked at one thing and tasted of another, and crumbled up a third, and soon had an unsightly litter on and all around her plate.

Madam Jernyngham, who was "neatness itself," called a servant to change Miss McAlpine's plate and to bring her a clean napkin, and to brush the crumbs from before her.

But before Euripides could obey, Halcyone loudly protested against any one taking so much trouble, demanding to know what was the odds so one had enough to eat?

Madam Jernyngham looked at her rebukingly; but Hal. did not mind. She seemed suddenly to remember her lover, who was dutifully seated at her right side; and, turning to him, insisted on piling *his* plate with all the luxuries on the tea-table.

It was quite useless for the poor victim to smile, shake his head and object. Hal. insisted, saying, as she heaped up sardines, sweetmeats, pickles, cakes, and all sorts of incongruous food, that he should make himself at home and feed well, for *her* sake!

"Just take this bit of pickled salmon and this bit of pound-cake to accommodate me," she urged, putting both viands side by side on the same plate.

Poor Clary! He began to think that his beloved was possessed of an evil spirit. He was heartily glad when tea was over and the service removed.

He went out and sat upon the sofa, feeling discomfited.

Fulvia Wall, as in a fit of absence of mind, went and sat by him. Whereupon Halcyone walked up in front of them, and looking, or affecting to look, daggers at Fulvia, exclaimed:

"Well, upon my word!"

"What's the matter?" inquired Miss Wall.

"I think that's very cool," proceeded Halcyone.

"What is very cool?—the draft from that window? I don't feel it. Do you?" inquired Fulvia, quietly, while poor Clary blushed up to his eyes.

"Oh, you know very well what I mean," exclaimed Halcyone, with a toss of her chin copied from that unrivalled artist, Pinky Skinner. "You know well enough what I mean! If you don't, I can tell you, Miss! I think you are very cool to be sitting down there by Clary and leaving me to stand up here!"

"Oh, I *beg* your pardon!" exclaimed Fulvia, rising quietly and retreating.

Halcyone immediately dumped herself down in the vacated place, with a look of defiance.

Clary's face was crimson! He would not have liked to acknowledge such a disloyal emotion; but, for the first

time in his life, he felt a little ashamed of his adored Halcyone, and a little grieved for Fulvia Wall.

"How dared *she* sit down right by your side so imprudently as if you were engaged to *her*, the minx! instead of me?" demanded Halcyone sharply, and making her eyes flash.

"I am sure Miss Wall meant no offence, dear Halcyone. I am very sorry that you should have supposed so," said Clary, gravely, and he felt like adding, "and I am sorrier still that you should have spoken to her as you did." But he was in love, so he refrained from reproaching her.

"Don't tell me! 'Meant no offence,' didn't she? Oh me, of course not. No offence to *you*," sneered Halcyone, curling up her nose after the most approved Pinky Skinner pattern.

"Nor to any one else, dear Halcyone. What offence could that young lady possibly have meant by taking the seat she innocently did?"

"Meant to take you away from me! That's what she did!"

"Oh, Halcyone, Halcyone, no one on earth could do that, even if any one wished, which I do not believe. You know I adore you, my darling," said loyal-hearted Clary, turning his candid blue eyes fondly on his love. But his glance fell upon her cross face and plastered hair, and he thought—"What a figure she has made of herself, to be sure!"

"You needn't try to fool *me*, Clary. I've got eyes in *my* head. And whether you would let Fulvia Wall take you away from me or not, I know she's trying to do it—there!" exclaimed Halcyone.

And oh! how little Halcyone knew how much truth she was really telling, or how hard Fulvia was trying to take her unloved lover from her. And her little Clarence knew how willing his beloved was to have him so taken.

"Yes," she added. "Fulvia Wall wants to take you away from me."

"Miss Wall! That splendid creature! that queen! want to take *me!* Why she is fit for a king!" exclaimed Clary, in sincere amazement and incredulity.

"Oh! thank you! *She's* fit for a *king*, is she? And *I'm not?* Thank you! *She's* too good for you, is she? And *I'm* not? Thank you! You are not good enough for *her*, aint you? But you're quite good enough for *me!* Oh, thank you! thank you! I'm *so* much obliged to you, your words are *so* complimentary to *me*, as well as to *yourself!*" said Miss McAlpine, with a toss of her head.

"Dear Halcyone! I hope I have said nothing to displease you! Indeed I did not mean to do so. You know that I admire and adore you beyond all others in the whole world."

"More than—'that splendid creature,' 'that queen' Fulvia?" sneered Halcyone.

"Why, my darling, I never even once dreamed of Miss Wall as a possible rival of yours. You can have no rival in my heart, dear Halcyone. I worship the ground you walk on," he fervently exclaimed.

"Do you now really, dear Clary?" she inquired.

"Heaven knows that I do," he answered, solemnly, as he fixed his eyes upon her. But again his glance fell upon the petulant face and the plastered hair, and he thought within himself—"Goodness gracious, what a fright she has made of herself!"

"How do you like this new way of wearing my hair, Clary? Isn't it very pretty and becoming?" she inquired, as she caught him gazing on her.

"Well—I don't—quite like it as well as I did your beautiful curls, Halcyone; nor do I think it so pretty, or so becoming to your bright face," answered the truthful lover, rather hesitatingly.

"Oh! And I thought you would admire it so! I fixed it this way on purpose to please *you* too," she said, in an assumed tone of disappointment.

"Then, dear, if you care to please me, wear your lovely natural curls. There is nothing so beautiful as they are."

"Oh, but I would rather wear my hair this way."

"Then, darling, wear it this way, or any way you like; you will always be lovely to me," said Clarence, earnestly.

"I don't believe you care one bit *how* I dress or *how* I wear my hair!" exclaimed Halcyone, petulantly.

"Yes, indeed, my dearest one, I do. Just now I expressed a preference for your bewitching curls," pleaded Clarence.

"Yes, just because I said I liked my hair done this way best. If you loved me, Clary, you would like whatever I like. But I don't believe you love me at all! There!"

"Not love you, my angel—oh Heaven, Halcyone, you ought to know, by this time, how much, how deeply, how perfectly I love you," exclaimed Clarence, divided between his joy in believing that *now* really his beloved did value his love and his embarrassment in meeting her unreasonable reproaches.

"I don't believe a word of it," snapped Miss McAlpine.

"Oh, Halcyone!"

"Well, I don't now! There! if you loved me as well as I love you, you wouldn't be everlastingly finding fault—with my hair, and my dress, and my words, and my manners, and all about me. There!"—("For," added Halcyone, mentally, "If you loved me as little as I love you, you wouldn't care a fig how I dressed or behaved.")

"My darling, I haven't been finding fault with you—I have only been answering questions honestly. And I have also been assuring you, as I assure you now, that I love you in any dress or any mood," pleaded Clary, puzzled to guess what on earth had got into the girl.

"Oh yes, you do—you look like it, don't you, when you sit down all the evening by Fulvia Wall!" snapped Halcyone.

"My best love, it was not all the evening—it was only five minutes," answered Clarence, in astonishment at her injustice.

"Oh, yes—contradict me, of course!—but, then, I dare say, it did seem very short to you, the time you passed by the side of your *'splendid creature,'* your *'queen,'* " answered Halcyone, curling up her nose in humble imitation of the inimitable Pinky.

Poor Clarence gazed on her in growing amazement. "Well," he thought to himself, "I never did see the likeness before, but upon my word, if I hadn't heard who were her parents, I should now believe her to be Pinky

Skinner's daughter." But Clary did not care to let any of these thoughts appear—on the contrary, he answered soothingly.

"Dear Halcyone, I could not help it. Miss Wall came and sat down quite naturally. There was plenty of room."

"Oh, yes—you say true in that—quite naturally! quite naturally, of course! There is nothing more natural than such an expression of preference. And there was plenty of room, too! Oh, plenty of room on the sofa, and plenty of room in your—hollow heart, sir! So far you have told me the truth, sir. But when you say you couldn't help it, you make a mistake, Clary. You *could* have helped it! When she sat down by you, you could have got up and left her. You would if you had cared for me as much as you pretend to do."

"My beloved Halcyone, you know that I care more for you than I do for all the whole world put together. But it would have been unpardonable rudeness in me to have got up and left Miss Wall under such circumstances."

"Oh, to be sure—certainly! Any act of attention or formality to *me* would have been construed into 'unpardonable rudeness' to your *'splendid creature,'* your *'queen,'* " sneered the little actress with a tone of voice and expression of face so accurately copied from the model she had adopted that Clary, in consternation and amazement, almost thought he saw Pinky Skinner standing there and taunting the old captain with *"his widows."*

"My darling Halcyone, are you quite well to-day?" inquired Clarence in some anxiety, for it now occurred to him that his jealous sweetheart might really be nervous, hysterical, or indisposed in some other manner to make her so irritable.

"Am I quite well? Oh, I don't *look* so—do I? Ah, how can I expect to look well in *your* eyes, just after you have been dazzling them with gazing on that 'SPLENDID' creature?"

Even gentle Clary's patience gave way now, and—

"I do not know what to make of you this evening, Halcyone," he said.

"Don't know what to make of me! don't you? Oh, no, of course not! You don't know what to make of *me!* You'd know well enough what to make of your *'queen'* though, if you could get her, wouldn't you? You'd make that *'splendid creature'* your wife, if you could!"

"Halcyone——" began Clarence. But she wouldn't let him get in a word edgeways.

"Don't know what to make of me! Oh, no! You win my warm heart; you follow me up and down the country, from house to house, and from room to room, yes, and frm seat to seat, until you corner me, and you persevere until you win my heart, and then you trifle with me, and torture me, until you get tired of the cruel sport, and then say you don't know what to make of me! Oh, no! —being tired of making *game* of me, you don't know what *else* to make of me! Oh, Clary, I did not think you would have tre!—tre—treated me so!" sobbed the little actress.

"Heaven and earth!" exclaimed Clarence, in desperation. "What is all this about? Halcyone, are you out of your senses?"

"Oh, Clary! don't ab—ab—ab—buse me so. If you can't love—ove me any longer, I can go and run away and die! and then you can marry your quee—een! But don't—ab—abuse me with har—ard words. I can't stand them from you—ou, Clary!" sobbed Halcyone, hysterically.

"Good——!" the awful Name was almost on his lips, but it was not uttered. He restrained himself, though he glanced wildly and hopelessly around him. Halcyone was jealous, he supposed! And without reason! Oh, of course without reason! Even he remembered "the jealous are not ever"—et cetera. He had never seen an exhibition of jealousy before this. And if this was one, he never wished to see another.

And now what should he do?

Soothe her jealousy by any means, of course. So he

took her seemingly reluctant hand, and in the most earnest and impressive manner, said to her:

"Halcyone, my beloved Halcyone; listen to me, for I am speaking solemn truth. I love you and prefer you to all the world besides. I have never loved any one else in my life; never dreamed of any one else as my wife; nor"—added he, with that presumptuous disposal of the future to which we are all but too prone—"nor shall I ever love any one else, or dream of any one else as my wife but yourself! Dear Halcyone, believe this! I will do anything in the world to prove this to you! I will marry you to-morrow! Oh, how willingly, how proudly, how joyfully, I will marry you to-morrow, if you will permit me to do so."

"You know very well that I cannot marry you until my dear father returns from abroad, Clary! You know when you make such a proposal that I cannot accept it," pouted Halcyone, who certainly did not desire this sort of compromise.

"But, my darling girl, the consent of parents having been gained, or being at least well understood, their presence, when inconvenient, is not so absolutely necessary at the marriage ceremony as to cause it to be deferred until their arrival. Remember, dearest, your father, knowing all the circumstances, deputed to Captain Storms, who has so well earned the trust, all parental authority over you. Captain Storms has consented to our union. Major Hourie is most anxious for it. All are agreed upon it. Make me happy, and yourself assured, by taking me at once, dear girl," pleaded the loyal lover, taking her hand.

But that was the last thing Halcyone wished to do. Besides, she had not done tormenting him yet. So she said:

"Where would be the good of my marrying you, Clary? If I cannot be your first choice, your *'queen!'*—do you think I wish to be your wife? If I cannot have your heart, do you think I want your hand?"

"Halcyone! Halcyone! You were and are my first

choice and my last! You are my only love! You have my whole heart; take my hand with it!"

"No, Clary!—if you are so mad to be married, you must go and marry your *'queen,'* your *'splendid creature!'*"

"Halcyone! dearest Halcyone!" exclaimed Clarence, earnestly, "If such a course will restore your faith in my constancy, I will promise you here and now, never to speak to Fulvia Wall again."

"Would you, Clary? Would you really make such a sacrifice as that for my sake?" inquired Halcyone, affecting to relent.

"Heaven knows I would! and consider it no sacrifice either!—though a little awkward, so long as we all remain in the same house together," said Clarence frankly.

"It wouldn't be a 'little awkward,' Clary, it would be very awkward. No. Clary, I'll not ask you to do so much as that; but I will ask you to be very *cold* to her, and if she comes and sits down by you again, to get up and go and leave her. And I wish, Clary, you would be very cold to *all* the girls, and not flirt with them so much."

"Flirt! I flirt! I! that have neither eyes nor ears, nor heart, nor head, for any one in the world but you! But, be assured, dear Halcyone, that little as I have hitherto noticed other young ladies, since it annoys you, I will notice them still less."

"And pay more attention to *me,* Clary, than you have lately done!"

"Dearest Halcyone, if you will permit me to do so, I will remain at your side all day, and every day from the time I bid you good morning until I bid you good night!" fervently exclaimed the boy.

"That would be inconvenient, Clary; but you must stay by me as much as possible."

"As much as you will let me, dearest girl."

"All right, then."

"And now are we friends again, sweet love?"

"Yes; friends again. Only mind, Clary, no flirting with other girls, and most especially with Fulvia Wall."

"No, my beloved Halcyone. The most jealous and ex-

acting lady-love shall have no cause to complain of me."

"Do you call *me* 'jealous and exacting?' " snapped Halcyone.

"No, dear love, no!" hastily replied Clarence, fearing a relapse,—"You are an angel. I only meant if you *were* so, you should have no cause to complain of me."

"Well, sir, see that I have not. I'm no fool. I shall keep my eyes 'peeled' and watch you well. And if *I* catch you at any of your tricks, *you'll* catch it."

"Watch me well, dear love. I glory in having your sweet glance on me. And *now* are we reconciled?"

"Yes," gracious answered Halcyone, who was tired of acting a part, and wished to put an end to the scene.

They sat talking a few minutes longer on that distant sofa, in the twilight, until they were interrupted by the entrance of Euripides with the lamps, and the re-entrance of "Queen Fulvia," followed by all her court.

Yet, still the lovers—if they might be called such—sat side by side. Halcyone did not stir, and Clary did not dare to do so.

Clary was perplexed by the jarring of the most contradictory emotions. He was at once glad and sorry, elated and depressed, proud and ashamed.

Happy and elevated by the discovery he thought he had made of the true state of Halcyone's affections—their devotion to himself; but grieved and mortified by her exhibition of jealousy and ill-temper, and her free use of slang words.

And among all these conflicting emotions occasionally came others—wonder, curiosity, speculation. That Halcyone should have accused "Queen Fulvia" of having fallen in love with him, and of wishing to win him away from her. And she must have really believed what she said, or she would never have betrayed such an intensity of jealousy.

Could it be true, he asked himself, could it possibly be true that that superb beauty should have cast a favoring thought on him?

He had known Fulvia Wall since their childhood, and he knew that she had grown up to be a magnificently

beautiful woman; but he had never looked at her very attentively, and never thought of her at all, especially in the light of a lover. But now, as she gracefully swam into the drawing-room, he looked at her with a new interest. And the scales fell from his eyes! They were opened and he saw!

"Why I always knew she was a beautiful girl, but I had no idea *how* beautiful until now. It is impossible such a peerless creature could ever think of *me!* but even if she could, it would be nothing to me! I could never, never be unfaithful to my beloved Halcyone," fervently repeated the fond heart to itself.

Halcyone, who was covertly watching him, was quick-sighted enough to see the effect her play-acting had produced upon her lover. And she resolved to follow it up every day with the performance of just such scenes, increasing their intensity with repetition. She feared it would be fatiguing; but she was sure it would be remunerative.

That evening Berenice played quadrilles, and her companions danced. Clarence dutifully danced with his betrothed all the time. But in the changes of the figure, he sometimes had to turn Fulvia as well as his partner. And every time he met the beauty's eyes, or touched her hand, he thought—"Is it possible she could love *me?*" and a sweet, sharp thrill vibrated through his heart and frame, such as he had never felt in the presence of any other woman,—no, not even in that of his beloved Halcyone. And the question recurred—"Is it possible she could love me?" And the question recurred not only then, but many times thereafter. And all the time he felt Halcyone's pretended "jealous" eyes upon him and winced and blushed under them. And still he repeated to himself—"She need not doubt me; I will never be untrue to my dear love." And he tried loyally to refrain from lifting his eyes to meet those of the beautiful Fulvia, and also from asking himself that tantalizing question—"Could it be possible?" &c.

As the little party was separating for the night, and Clary took the hand of Halcyone to bid her good night,

she snatched it away, looked him reproachfully in the face, and whispered vindictively:

"Very well, sir! What did I tell you? You think I have got no eyes! But I saw your goings on. And you will catch it to-morrow."

And catch it he did the first time Halcyone found herself alone with him. Her acted tears, reproaches and accusations were even more violent than before. Clary had more difficulty in soothing her.

And every day after this Halcyone re-enacted the scene of fierce, unreasonable jealousy. No matter what her victim did or left undone, it was all the same, he was subjected to violent accusations and reproaches. At length poor Clary was driven almost to distraction and Halcyone felt sure of triumph.

CHAPTER VIII.

DAYS OF ABSENCE.

At length a letter came from Vandeleur—a long letter, written at intervals on board the steamer, and containing a detailed account of the voyage, which was monotonous enough.

A postscript was added, describing their safe arrival at Havre, their excellent quarters at the hotel, the improved health of the whole party, and the home-sickness of the lover, who was impatient to return to his beloved. He should see Bishop Waldemar safe at Rome, he said, and then, without even tarrying to inspect the Eternal City, he should at once set out on his return home.

This letter did more for Berenice than all the efforts of all her friends. It comforted, cheered and revived her. She now began to look forward to his arrival. She calculated the time as closely as she could. She made out that it would take him but a few days to travel from Havre to Rome, and a few more days to travel back from Rome to Havre, where he would take the American

steamer for New York. And so, if he should journey as fast as his letter had, he would follow it in about ten days.

Berenice was now all eagerness and delight, and began to make various little preparations for the arrival of her lover; forgetting for a while, in the joy of anticipating his return, that she had decided most solemnly that he could never be more to her than he was now.

Madam Journey clasped her hands, and sighed.

"The child is insane," she said, "since she will neither marry him nor give him up! Oh! what is to be done! I wish he would stay away! She *might* forget him in time!"

Meanwhile the month for which the young party had been invited to stay at Henniker drew to a close. The youthful guests went home. And at Fulvia's earnest invitation, and at Captain Storms's decided recommendation, and also with a view to carrying on her own conspiracy, Halcyone promised to accompany the Wall sisters to the farm.

Poor Clary heard of this arrangement in simple consternation. He had looked forward to the breaking up of the party with satisfaction and desire, as the event which should part Fulvia from Halcyone and himself, and at once deliver him from the terrible torture of Halcyone's jealousy, and from the temptation to inconstancy, which that very jealousy, combined with the daily presence of its object, created.

If once Fulvia were away, he argued, Halcyone would no longer be jealous of her, and he himself would forget any little transient admiration or interest in her, that really Halcyone's own suggestions had first awakened.

But now, here was a consummation! Halcyone was going home with Fulvia! And if he wished to see his sweetheart he must visit her at the house of her supposed rival. Poor Clary foresaw endless quarrels, reproaches and hysterics, such as had already so severely shocked his delicate, sensitive, refined nature; and so he resolved to expostulate with Halcyone on the subject.

"I think it very strange, Halcyone, and very injudicious, also, in you to accept Miss Wall's invitation to

the farm—under all the circumstances," he said, when he found himself alone with her, on the morning of their intended departure.

"Under all *what* circumstances?" snapped Halcyone.

"Your—jealousy of her," softly and hesitatingly answered Clarence.

"*My* jealousy of her!" retorted Halcyone, turning up her nose, a la Pinky Skinner. "*My* jealousy of her! Humph! indeed, I should not venture to be jealous of *'queens'* and *'splendid creatures,'* no matter how much cause I might have!"

Poor Clarence sighed deeply, without replying.

But Pinky Skinner's disciple was not going to let him off so easily.

"How dare you accuse me of jealousy of Miss Wall, Clarence Fairlie?" she fiercely demanded.

"Well,—*distrust*, then, perhaps I should have said," he answered deprecatingly.

"Yes, I think you should! For I do distrust her—and you too, sir!"

"Then I say, my dear Halcyone, that it is very strange and even injudicious that you should accept an invitation to her house," said Clarence, with an effort to be firm.

"Oh! you do, do you? Well, *I* think it is natural and wise."

"I differ wholly with you, dear love, and I implore you for all our sakes not to go," pleaded Clary.

"But I will go! there! and I tell you what, sir! You had better not try to be hectoring and tyrannizing over me until you have a lawful right to do so! for I won't stand it from you; there," exclaimed Halcyone, with her eyes flashing fire.

"Good Heavens, my love! I never dreamed of attempting such a thing. I should not presume even to dictate! even to advise! only to *implore*, as I still must persist to do, that you will not go to the farm," said Clarence.

"I *will* go! there! so it's no use, your imploring."

"But why should you go, distrusting her as you do?"

"For the very reason that I *do* distrust her, there. I distrust *her,* and I distrust *you,* and I go to the farm to keep my eyes on you *both!*" said Halcyone, with a cunning and spiteful look.

Clary would not have owned the sentiment for the world—no, not even to himself; but he was absolutely angry and disgusted with his adored lady-love.

"Oh, yes! I know!" continued Halcyone, snapping her fingers almost in his amazed face. "You think I'm a fool, but I'm not. I see why you don't want me to go to the farm. You want Fulvia all to yourself, there—'with nobody very near,' as the song says. But I'll be very near; and that I tell you. Oh, yes; I know all about it—

> 'How happy could you be with either,
> Were the other dear charmer away.'

and all that. But the 'other dear charmer' won't be away, and that I assure you."

"Great Heavens, Halcyone," exclaimed Clary, when the girl had paused for want of breath, "how much I have been mistaken in you!"

"Well, I guess you have, if you took me for one you could easily make a fool of. No, Clary, I have some sense. I know very well, if I were not to go to the farm, that you would spend half your time there flirting with Fulvia. And I won't have it. You're engaged to *me;* and I mean to keep you to your engagement. I'm not to be trifled with, and that I tell you."

Clarence did not defend himself from these unjust charges. What would have been the good? As well reason with a maniac, he thought. And, oh! thinking of that he began shrewdly to suspect that he himself had been a maniac in his passion for this jealous and ill-tempered beauty. He had been foolish in his love, and hasty in his proposal. But it was done and over. And the loyal-hearted boy had no more idea of retreating from his fatal position, than if he had been already married to Halcyone.

She accompanied Fulvia and Flavia to the farm.

And there every day her loyal lover dutifully rode out to visit her, although he knew he went to certain torture; for scenes of bitter reproaches, reckless accusations and violent hysterics were of almost daily recurrence.

And Clary would go away shocked, grieved and ashamed.

And Halcyone and Fulvia would have a talk and a laugh—half of pity, half of fun—at the progress of the boy's cure; for the treatment of his malady, though very severe, promised to be perfectly successful.

CHAPTER IX.

A STORM AT STORMY POINT.

MEANWHILE trouble was brewing at Stormy Point. Miss Pinky Skinner, left alone with the three bachelors of that bachelor establishment, for the first few weeks consoled the captain for the absence of Halcyone, by tickling that old gourmand's palate with the most delicious dishes that her culinary art could compose. The captain was content; and more, he was delighted.

"Pinky grows better and better every day of her life," he declared. "But oh! I hope it aint true, what Vandeleur said! I hope and trust and pray she will never take it into her head to—to drive things to extremities!" he added, with a fearful foreboding of the future.

But long-suffering Miss Pinky had at last most decidedly determined to "drive things to extremities," and the captain was her foredoomed victim!

And she prepared for the battle like a skillful tactician. First she accustomed the captain to those delicate dishes that she only could prepare; and she also took great care that her handmaids should not learn her art. She kept her power in her own possession. And then just before she was ready to strike her final blow, she used up all the best groceries; and bought the next of the most inferior quality she could possibly procure. She

knew that the simple old captain would thereafter attribute his bad meals entirely to the bad cooking, whereas one-half the evil would be due to the bad material. Having laid her train she fired it!

The captain had eaten a most delicious breakfast, prepared by her hands from the last of the best provisions, and he was sitting, in a state of bodily beatitude reading his paper and never dreaming of evil at hand, for he had not a very prophetic soul, when Miss Pinky Skinner, bonnetted and shawled, with a travelling bag in her hand, stood before him.

He looked up without misgiving. He only thought she was going to the village to buy provisions.

"Well, Captain Storms, I have come to bid you good-bye," she said, with very provoking calmness.

"Eh," exclaimed the old man, curving one hand behind his ear, under the impression that he had suddenly grown deaf and had not heard aright.

"I have come to bid you—good-BYE!" repeated Pinky Skinner, as if she too shared the impression of his deafness.

"To bid me good——" began the captain opening his eyes and mouth to their widest extent and staring in astonishment—— "to bid me good——"

"BYE!—yes! Can't you hear me?" bawled Pinky.

"Why—where——" again began the old man; but he stopped and stared, he could do no more!

"I'm going away! Can't you understand that? Going away!"

"Going away——"

"Don't keep repeating my words after me, like a great ugly old poll parrot! Though you look more like an old owl with your eyes popped out of your head, staring! Yes, I'm going away, Captain Storms."

"Lord bless my soul and life, what's this? But where are you going? And you'll not be gone long, will you?"

"I don't know exactly where I'm going, but I know I am going forever."

"Forever! Heaven and earth! This is very sudden. It takes a man so unawares he don't know what to think

or to say!" exclaimed the poor ill-used old fellow. Then as a bright idea flashed upon his mind, bringing with it a feeling of relief upon his own account, he said—"Oh! I understand. You are—Ha! ha! ha!—going with Pike Turner."

"PIKE TURNER!" cried Miss Pinky, jumping at him so suddenly that the captain backed his chair up against the wall and put up both his hands, exclaiming in dismay:

"Now don't! don't get excited Miss Pinky!"

"Well, then, don't mention Pike Turner's name to me again."

"I won't, Miss Pinky. I won't indeed. Then you're not going to be married?"

"MARRIED!" she cried, jumping at him again.

"Don't do that, Miss Pinky!" he cried, flattening himself up against the wall and holding up his hands.

"Then don't talk to me about being married."

"I won't, Miss Pinky! I won't indeed! I'm sorry I mentioned the matter, but it was a mere slip of the tongue, and I'll never do it again. I meant nothing, upon my word, I didn't. In fact I have no inclination *that* way myself. Not in the least, I assure you."

"What do you think *I* care about your 'inclinations,' sir? Do you mean to insult me?" fiercely demanded Miss Skinner, jumping at him once more, with a convulsive clutching of her fingers.

"No, no, certainly not; nothing of the kind, I assure you my dear Miss Pinky!" hastily replied the captain, pressing himself up in the corner until the plastering cracked, and looking wildly around for a loop-hole of escape. There was none! She stood right before him, fierce, lithe and alert as a catamount.

The captain in his time, had been in many an awful storm, and many a bloody battle, and had borne himself bravely through all; but he was terribly afraid of Miss Skinner. He was a big man and she was but a little woman. But just think of an ox and a wild cat and you have the situation! There is many a hero, who would face the "substance of ten thousand men," yes,

and fight them too, rather than engage in single combat with a wild cat!

The captain was helpless.

"I meant no offence, Miss Pinky, I assure you I did not," he pleaded deprecatingly.

"Then mind what you say! I did not come here to be insulted; I came to bid you good-bye! And now I have done it, I'm going," she said snappishly!—but she did not turn to go.

"But my dear Miss Pinky," inquired the captain, after a little pause—"what is all this about? Why are you going?" (and "why on earth don't you go?" he would have liked to have asked her, if he had dared and—if he could have spared her services,)—"Why are you going?"

"Because I want to go."

"Has anybody hurt your feelings?"

"Humph indeed! they'd better not try!"

"Because if they have Miss Pinky——"

"They'd beter not, I tell you! I can take my own part, I reckon!"

"Are you dissatisfied with your home then?" inquired the captain, deftly edging out of his corner, to prepare the way for escape in case of necessity.

"No, I'm not!" answered Miss Skinner, letting him slip past her, for it seemed she had no intention to pen him up there. Once out of his corner the hero felt bolder.

"Then if no one has affronted you and you are not dissatisfied with the home, why should you——"

"Because I want to!" snapped Miss Skinner, cutting him short before he could finish his sentence.

"Is it the wages then, Miss Pinky? If so, I am willing to increase——"

"It is not the wages," answered Miss Skinner with an ineffable curl of her nose and toss of her head.

"Then what the deuce is it?—I declare I never was so taken aback in my life! What is it, Miss Pinky?"

"I have told you twice already! because I want to go! Isn't that reason enough?"

"But *why* do you want to go?"

Miss Skinner did not reply.

"Why?" repeated the captain.

Miss Skinner looked down and continued silent.

And not until the captain had reiterated and pressed the question, did she answer it. Turning her head away she said sullenly—

"It's my character, if you must know!"

"Your——? I *beg* your pardon?" slowly inquired the puzzled old man.

"My CHARACTER! Are you growing deaf sure enough?" bawled Miss Skinner.

"Your——" exclaimed the captain, staring.

"Yes! I suppose you think I have got none! But I have! Or that I don't value it! But I do! for it's all I've got!"

"But my dear Miss Pinky," said the sorely perplexed old man, scratching his head, "what *is* all this about your character? Has anybody been slandering you?"

"Slandering ME! screamed Miss Skinner, jumping at him so violently, that he reeled back as if he had been struck. "Slandering me! What do you mean by that, Captain Storms?"

"Nothing! nothing in the world offensive. I do assure you! Pray, be composed!" pleaded the captain, deprecatingly.

"What did you mean, I ask you?" fiercely demanded the lady.

"Oh dear! oh lord!—Nothing, I tell you! You said something about your character!"

"Yes I did, though you see to think I have got none, or I don't value it!"

"Indeed, I think that you have an uncommonly strong one and value it very highly," said the captain soothingly.

"Yes; and I don't mean to risk it by staying here."

"By staying——?"

"—Here! no."

"My dear Miss Pinky, what are you talking about?"

"You know well enough—my character—my good name. I'm not a-going to risk them by stopping here

with a single man, and no lady in the house—there, now it's all out!"

As Miss Skinner delivered herself of this speech, the old captain lifted his hands to his temples, took hold of his gray hair as if he would have pulled it out by the roots, and stared more frightfully than ever.

"Don't stand there staring at me as if you were moon-struck, Captain Storms. You understand this as well as I do," she angrily exclaimed.

"I'm blowed if I do. Why, my good woman—lady, I mean—you've been stopping here for years and years!" he answered.

"And you hit me in the teeth with that, do you?"

"No, indeed—I only state it as a fact."

"Yes, you do—you hit me in the teeth with it. But the circumstances were very different let me tell you. When I first came here you had an old aunt living with you. She was bedridden to be sure, but still she was a protection to my good name. Before she died Halcyone grey up, and though she was but a young thing, her presence was a protection too. But now Halcyone has gone away—has been away more than a month, and is going to stay longer. And here am I living in the house with a single man and no lady here to protect me—and I won't do it, Captain Storms!"

The old man scratched his head in confusion for some minutes, and then ventured to suggest:

"But, my dear Miss Pinky, in the meantime, many years have passed, and you and I——"

But he caught the snap of her eyes, and seeing that another jump was impending, he quickly amended his speech:

"—At least I am growing old, quite old——"

"Oh, yes; old sinners are the worst of sinners," spitefully commenced Miss Skinner.

"But, on my soul, I do assure you—if that will give you any confidence—I do assure you, upon my sacred honor, that I have never had a thought that ought to offend your delicacy. I have never experienced the slightest tempta——"

"Don't tell me about your temptations!" cried Miss Skinner, with such a violent jump at him that the captain staggered back until he was brought up short by the doorpost.

"I—I was only going to assure—to assure—you, Miss Pinky, that I had never felt the least temptation to transcend—to trespass—to——"

"Hold your tongue," cried Miss Skinner, with another spring, that was met by another wince. "I won't hear anything about your temptations. Go and confess them to the priest, and let him put you on bread and water to fetch you down a little. I'm not the proper person to hear such improper things—how dare you mention them to me."

"Oh, good gracious, how you *will* misunderstand me!" groaned the persecuted old man, wiping his flushing and perspiring face.

"And now I'm going to go. And that's all about it," she repeated.

The victimized master of the house wondered why she didn't "go" instead of standing there reiterating that she was "going to," but he dared not express such a thought; and then he reflected on his comforts, and upon the whole, he preferred that she should stay and recover her good humor, so he said, coaxingly:

"Come, Miss Pinky, I don't want to lose you; I don't indeed. I can't consent for you to leave me! I can't really. The length of time you have been with me, and your great personal merits——"

"Oh, yes my 'great personal merits,'" sneered Miss Skinner with a curl of her nose and a toss of her head, yet in a half mollified mood withal, for she did not know but that now the long-desired, long deferred courtship was about to commence.

"Yes, my good Miss Pinky, I repeat, and reiterate, and will maintain against all opposition, your great, very great personal merits and domestic accomplishments also would make you invaluable in any family, and *do* make you quite indispensable to mine. And so, now, if you will only be so good as to remain, I will—I will——"

Here the captain paused and scratched his head, as in doubt and perplexity, while Miss Skinner watched him in ill-concealed impatience and anxiety. At length, as he continued silent, she could stand it no longer, and as a fillip to his memory, she asked:

"—You will—*what*, sir?"

"Ah! sit down, my dear woman, don't stand. It looks as if you were waiting to be off you know; and I don't mean to let you go; I prize you too highly for that. Sit down; and I'll sit too. We can talk better so," said the captain, soothingly, as he let himself drop into a chair, for in truth he was so much overcome by what had passed that he was not very well able to stand. Miss Pinky also sat down and waited. But as the old man only scratched his head and rubbed his chin, she ventured on another reminder.

"Well, Captain?"

"Ah! yes, to be sure. Well, I was saying, that if you will only make me happy and comfortable by staying where you are, and never upset me by mentioning such a misfortune as your going away would be, but be willing to consider this house as your permanent home for life, I will——"

But here again the captain brought his speech to a dead halt, while he scratched his head and rubbed his chin more furiously than before.

"—Will—*what*, Captain? You may speak out freely to me, for you haven't a better real friend or well-wisher in the world, than I am," said Miss Pinky, encouragingly.

"I believe that! I do believe that!" answered the old man, with sudden animation, for he was delighted to think that the storm had now blown over. "Yes, I believe that; though you *have* got a devil of a temper," he added to himself.

"But what was it you were going to say, Captain?" inquired Miss Pinky, perceiving that he was about to relapse into silence and confusion.

"Why—I was about to—to make you a proposal, my dear woman."

"Oh!" sighed Miss Pinky, looking down. She felt sure that her point was gained.

But instead of making the proposal, the old man, with a provoking fatuity, resumed the rubbing of his chin.

"Dear me," murmured Miss Skinner, in a half audible tone, "what a difficulty he has in getting it out, to be sure. And he a widower, too. I must give him more encouragement, I do suppose."

Then raising her voice a little, she said:

"You were about to observe, sir."

"Well, yes, I was going to say, if you would do as I wish you, and make yourself contented with me and my rough home——"

"Hem, yes, certainly, Captain," answered Miss Skinner, hastily drawing in her line, to land the gudgeon she supposed she had caught.

—"I would, this very day——" continued the captain; but then he paused, and in the most provoking manner began to scratch his head again; but catching Miss Pinky's eye fixed upon him with an expression of impatience approaching anger, he suddenly resumed:

—"I would this very day—but then I'm not sure whether we could do it to-day; and that's just what's kept me hesitating and cogitating over the matter. Do you think it could be done to-day?" he inquired, still scratching his head, and looking into Miss Skinner's face for assistance.

She gave it to him immediately.

"Well, sir, perhaps it *might*. The notice is short, to be sure," she said, looking modestly down to the carpet.

"Yes, it *is* short," admitted the captain, apologetically—"it is very short. I wish it had been thought of before; but if you think it *too* short——"

"Well, no, sir, under the circumstances, I don't. You and I have known each other so long, and lived under the same roof so many years, that——"

—"We don't want to part, eh, Miss Pinky?" exclaimed the infatuated old sailor, rubbing his hands in delight.

"I was about to say that—it makes a great difference; and that the matter may be managed to-day, since you

make such a point of it, Captain," said Miss Skinner very demurely.

"It's *you* that makes a point of it!" exclaimed the captain, bluntly.

"My good name, you see, sir——"

"Oh, yes, certainly, your good name! Pray, don't begin upon that subject again, my dear woman! Your good name shall be taken care of. It shall be done this very day. Are the horses quite fresh?"

"Oh, quite, sir."

"It will take Hal. very much by surprise, I know," murmured the captain, "and Hal. and Fla. won't like it."

"I don't think their foolish fancies ought to be thought of, sir."

"No, no."

"And is Bobadilla engaged in anything very important?"

"He is particularly engaged in smoking his pipe by the kitchen fire, sir."

"Oh, well, I guess we can break in upon that occupation. Will you be so good as to say to him, Miss Pinky, that he must put the horses to the carriage, and have it round at the door in an hour from this."

"Yes, sir," said Miss Skinner, hurrying out to do her errand.

The Captain walked up and down the room in great disturbance of mind, which he betrayed by clutching at his hair, rubbing his chin, pulling his beard, and ejaculating at intervals:

"Oh, good gracious! what it is to be plagued with a woman, whom one can neither do *with* nor *without!*" or words to the same effect. At length he left off trotting up and down the floor, and muttering to himself that it was "time for him to get ready," he went up-stairs and dressed himself in his Sunday's best suit, and came down again just as the carriage drove up to the door.

To his surprise he found Miss Skinner awaiting him, "in gorgeous array." She was dressed in a handsome silver grey silk and a white Paisley shawl—(presents from the generous old sailor on some former occasion).

She also wore an elegant bonnet, with a white veil over her face, and white kid gloves on her hands.

As the captain gazed on this splendid apparition, his surprise ascended to astonishment, to amazement, to consternation!

"Why, Miss Pinky, are you going too?" he inquired—or rather gasped.

"I going too? Why *of course* I am going too, Captain. What on earth do you mean?"

"I—I—don't mean anything in particular; only I didn't know you were going with me, and it took me a little by surprise."

"Well, now, I think that is very strange. Certainly I expected to accompany you. I supposed that the ceremony was going to be performed at the church. I never suspected you were going to fetch a priest to perform it here. But if you prefer it here, it doesn't matter to me, I'm sure. It would be more private certainly, and I'm dressed for either occasion," said Miss Pinky, with a flourish of her embroidered pocket handkerchief.

"'Perform'—'Priest'—'Ceremony,'" panted the captain, pale and aghast. "What—what do you mean, Miss Pinky?"

"What do *you* mean, sir? That's what I want to know. What do *you* mean? What was that you proposed to me, in the parlor just now? Do you want to back out? Tell me that?" demanded Miss Skinner.

"I—I think there's some mistake—I—I fear there must be some—some serious—some—some fatal mistake. BOBADILLA!"

The coachman came at his master's urgent call.

"Fetch—fetch me a glass of water here," panted the captain; but as he spoke his eyes fell upon his servant, who was decorated with a white ribbon bow, as big as a full-grown cabbage, and the old sailor's panic turned to fury. "Stop! you old villain!" he exclaimed, shaking his fist—"What the devil do you mean by making a Merry Andrew of yourself in that way? Eh? What have you got that thing stuck on your coat for?"

"Beg pardon, marser. I did it for de bes'. I did it

honor of youse an' missis's weddin' sar," answered the old man, pulling his forelock.

"Wedding! Thunder and lightning! Heaven and earth! Death and destruction! Wedding? Here, you —Boba—BRANDY!"

And the captain dropped down upon the first chair, a great, white, quivering mass of helpless flesh.

The old negro ran and brought the brandy, and put it to his master's lips.

The victim drank it off and recovered some strength and self-possession.

"And now, sir!" exclaimed Pinky Skinner, fiercely; "I demand to be informed what is the meaning of all this; and whether I am to be made a fool of?"

"My—my dear woman, there is certainly some dep—deplorable mistake. I never meant to make a fool of any one," faltered the captain.

"Well, then, what *did* you mean? And what *do* you mean, tell me that!"

"I meant to say, if you would consent to stay with me, I would order the carriage and horses—if they were fresh—and I would go to old Mr. Basil Wall's farm and fetch Halcyone home, sudden as the notice would be to shorten her visit; so you, with another lady in the house, wouldn't mind stopping with a single gentleman, especially one as old as I am."

"WHAT?" cried Miss Skinner, like a clamp of thunder.

Where now was her self-assured triumph.

"Bobadilla! Some more brandy here, for the love of Heaven!" cried the quivering captain.

The old servant brought the required restorative, which his master drank at a draught. Then the captain turned his frightened eyes upon his angry housekeeper, and repeated:

"Yes—that's what I meant, Miss Pinky, and I'm very sorry I didn't make my meaning clear enough at the time, and I hope you will forgive me."

"Didn't you tell me you had a proposal to make to me? Answer me that!" screamed Miss Skinner.

"Yes—yes—certainly!—I did!" faltered the captain.

"But—but—it wasn't a proposal of marriage! I—I shouldn't have dared, you know! I'm—I'm a deal too old for such a fine young woman as you are, Miss Pinky."

"Hush your lies! And tell me this: Didn't you ask me if I could be contented with you and your home?"

"Yes—yes—I—I did! But I meant as my housekeeper! Not as my wife! But shouldn't have dared, you know!"

"Didn't you order the carriage and horses to take me to church to be married? Answer me that!"

"No, Heaven knows I didn't!" replied the captain, upon whom the brandy was beginning to take effect.

"Why, even Bobadilla knows that you did, for he put a wedding favor on his coat."

"What made you think I was going to commit such a folly, sir?" sharply demanded the captain, turning upon his old servant.

"Lor'-a-mighty, Marster, I didn't mean no harm, sir; nor likewise no offence—I——"

"Lor's Marster, words drapped by Miss Pinky when she gave me my orders, sir, led me to s'pose as you and she was gwine to be married."

"Words! What words, sir?"

"'Deed Marster, I disremember what. It was something 'bout my having of a new missis over me; and *she was her*—Miss Pinky, I mean."

The captain looked from his old servant to his ex-housekeeper. He had got his spirits up by pouring spirits down, and he wasn't afraid of her now—especially as she had stopped scolding, and had sat down and begun to cry. It was very seldom Miss Pinky condescended to such weakness; but now she was really shedding tears of mingled anger, disappointment and mortification.

"Come, Miss Pinky," said the captain, kindly, "there has been a mistake, for which no one on earth is to blame, unless it is myself, for my blundering obscurity of speech. And there has been no harm done. And now as I really cannot *bear* to give you up; I will tell you what I did mean and what I *will* do. And I will speak so plainly this time that there will be no possibility of mis-

understanding me. And when you have heard me out, I hope we may shake hands and make friends."

"There's only *one* condition upon which I will consent to stay in this house," sobbed Miss Skinner.

"Well, I am not quite certain what condition you refer to; but I hope I may be able to fulfill it. What I *did* mean to propose to you was not marriage, as I told you before, but the immediate return of Halcyone, for the satisfaction of your own delicate scruples; and the hesitation that might have looked so much like diffidence of an old suitor, was really nothing more than my reluctance to cut short the child's visit; and my doubt was, as to whether the horses were in a condition to go such a distance over such bad roads. There, Miss Pinky, I have told you what I meant, and now I'll tell you what I'll do. If you will consent to remain with me, I will do all I can in the world to make you happy and comfortable. I will bring Halcyone home this very day, to begin with."

"What will be the good of that?" snapped Miss Skinner. "Halcyone is going to be married soon! And when she is married, she will be taken away. And then I should have to go, of course. So I might as well go now; especially as I am already packed up."

"Stay, at least, until Halcyone is married. Stay and see the child you have helped to raise settled in the world, and after that we can talk about your going."

"No, I won't. She's not my child. *I* have no children to care for, and nobody to care for me, so I must care for myself; so I'll not stay, except upon one condition."

"And what is *that*, Miss Pinky?" inquired the captain, with a momentary relapse into fear and trembling—"what is that, Miss Pinky?"

"I'm not going to tell you. You must find it out for yourself. And if you set half the store by me you pretend to set, you'll find it out soon enough."

"Miss Pinky," said the captain, after a short pause and some reflection, "I'll tell you what I'll do if you'll stay: I'll—I'll try to make up a match between you and my brother Dick—I will, indeed. Dick is a good, easy fel-

low, and I know he would do almost anything in the world to oblige me, and——"

"Hold your tongue, you old reprobate—how dare you mention such a thing as that to me? Am I begging for a husband that you should dare to name your ugly old bachelor brother to me?" screamed Miss Skinner.

"Well, I won't do so any more, Pinky—I won't, indeed; but if you will only compose your mind and consent to stay with me, I will increase your wages."

A curl of the nose and a toss of the head more expressive than any words, spoke Miss Skinner's perfect contempt for this offer.

"Miss Pinky," said the captain, trying again, "I'll double them! What odds to me how much I pay, so I'm comfortable. Come, Miss Pinky, I'll double your wages. And now let's shake hands and make friends," cried the captain cordially, heartily holding out his hand.

"I would see you at Jericho first!" fiercely exclaimed Miss Pinky, striking away the proffered palm.

"And so you won't stay?"

"Not to save your soul! There! I've stayed too long already!"

"Well, I think it perfectly outrageous, your taking advantage of me to go off in this sudden manner, leaving me in the lurch!" exclaimed the captain, beginning to lose his temper.

"I'm a free woman and I'll do as I please," retorted Miss Pinky, with a toss of her head.

"Oh, yes, you're a free woman. If you were a free *man* I'd take the law of you!" cried the captain, whose hasty words proved how little he knew of the law in such cases made and provided.

Miss Skinner laughed contemptuously and answered:

"The only law you could take of me would be to take my current quarter's wages, and I'm sure you're welcome to that if it will do you any good! I'm sure it will neither make, nor yet break *me!* So take my wages."

"Blast the wages! Do you think I would take a penny of them? You know me better."

"Good-bye, captain!"

"Go to the devil!"

"I'm going," said Miss Pinky. And she went.

"Well," sighed the captain, sitting down in his chair and wiping his face, "I'm saved! Yes, thank goodness, I'm saved."

But the self-congratulations of the honest captain came to an end very soon. His dinner, composed of inferior materials, purposely selected and prepared by inefficient cooks, designedly kept in ignorance by the tactics of Miss Skinner, was, just as he pronounced it, "execrable." His soup was thin, flat, and smoky; his fish stale, overdone, and mushy; his turkey dried up; his potatoes waxy; his tarts tough and leathery. In short, the dinner was detestable, and the captain was a miserable man that day, with the prospect of being miserable for many days thereafter.

Certainly he would have brought Halcyone home now, if he had not known that she was as ignorant of culinary matters as he was himself—kept ignorant by the cunning of Pinky Skinner, who chose to hold the sceptre of her power over the old gourmand in her own hands. And much the poor old captain blamed himself now, that, instead of taking Halcyone to sea with him and teaching her navigation, he had not left her with the ladies of Henniker to learn domestic economy.

But his regrets came too late to serve him now.

It is needless to enlarge upon his wretchedness, to show how his supper was as bad as his dinner, and his breakfast next morning worse than either; needless, also, to tell how he stormed—and stormed at his unfortunate "Haily Maries," without mercy, and—without effect. He only succeeded in terrifying the poor girls out of the little sense and skill they had between them, and thus making them more incapable, and his own case more hopeless, than ever.

He longed for the spring thaw to come, which should open the river, release the "Carrier," and let him off to sea again.

Meanwhile Miss Pinky Skinner did not descend to the

Diabolical Dignitary to whom she had been consigned by the captain.

She went—to borrow Bobadilla's expression—"She went and sot herself right down on top of old Mr. Basil Wall, as if *he* hadn't burdens enough to bear."

In other words, she betook herself to the Forest Farm, and joined Halcyone there on a visit of indefinite length to Fulvia and Flavia. This visit was unacceptable to everybody. To Halycone, because she knew that the absence of the housekeeper from Stormy Point must derange all her guardian's domestic affairs; to Fulvia and Flavia, because they had to crowd themselves into one small chamber, to make room for the new guest; to poor Pike Turner, who was far in the favor of the fair-haired Flavia, and did not want his courtship watched by ill-natured eyes; and even to the genial old Basil Wall himself, who never could endure the look of a peevish and discontented face at his table!—and Miss Skinner was always of that character.

But for all this the unwelcome visitor was well received and kindly treated. And she would not have been used in any other manner in any house in Maryland, and she knew it.

So deeply imbued are the people of that old state with the spirit of hospitality, that any decent visitor who should come among them, even uninvited and unacceptable, would be politely entertained as long as he or she should choose to stay, however inconvenient or expensive this course might be to the host or hostess. A Maryland householder would no more hint even to an intrusive visitor, that his or her presence was unwelcome, than he would pick that visitor's pocket. Of course this worship of hospitality is a fanaticism; but it is a lofty and generous fanaticism, so let it be!

Of course, also, Miss Skinner understood this; and she knew that if she chose to do so, she might spend the rest of the years of her life in a round of prolonged visits from plantation to plantation, without even being shown the door, or advised to earn her own living. She knew that even if her clothes should wear out, her wardrobe

would be constantly replenished by presents from friends and neighbors.

But to do Miss Pinky justice, she had no such sponging designs upon the neighborhood. She intended to stay at the Forest Farm until she had starved her gormandizing old sweetheart into submission. And she felt sure that it wouldn't take very long to do that either.

Now, then, while the honest old sailor was fretting and fuming over the desertion of his housekeeper; while Halcyone and Fulvia were carrying out their conspiracy for the cure of Clary, and while Pinky Skinner was "biding her time," other affairs were in progress elsewhere.

At Henniker House everybody was preparing to receive Vane Vandeleur, whose arrival was daily expected. It was impossible for any inmate of Henniker not to sympathize with the reviving joy of Berenice. Her face brightened with anticipation day by day.

"Vane *must* be here soon now, dear grandma," she said to Madam Journey. "After the most careful calculation, I have concluded that we must have followed his letter within ten days after sending it. But even giving him five days more, which is a wide margin, he *must* be here very soon."

"Yes, dear, and when he *does* come, you must marry him at once," the old lady replied.

"Never, never, never, dear grandmother," said Berenice, solemnly—"never will I marry him while the malediction lasts; but oh! it seems to me, now, that it will be happiness to see him once more."

But the old lady sighed deeply and wondered how all this was to end.

Berenice watched and waited in vain. Vandeleur did not come. A letter came instead. It was dated Rome, and informed his friends at Henniker, that within a few days after the arrival of their own party at Rome, Bishop Waldemar had taken a severe cold, which had settled on his chest; that he was now confined to his bed in a chamber of the Vatican, where Vandeleur was in close attendance upon him. "This," wrote the young man, "must

keep me here for some days or weeks longer; but just as soon as my valuable friend is sufficiently recovered to dispense with my services, I shall set out on my return to the United States and hurry to your dear presence, my beloved Berenice."

This was a disappointment, but not a crushing one. Berenice sighed and looked sobered down for three or four days; but when a week had passed, she rallied her spirits and began again to watch for Vandeleur—to watch in vain. Another letter came, telling her that Bishop Waldemar was no better; that his cold had culminated in pneumonia, which would be likely to confine him to his bed for a month, or more; that Vandeleur regretted this circumstance very much, not only on account of his aged pastor's sufferings, but also on account of his own homesickness. "I do so *pine* to return, that I often dream I am at home and wake up to find myself still in exile. And in the language of Scripture, I exclaim, 'Oh! that I had the wings of a dove, for then I would flee away and be at rest'—with you, my own Berenice! But be sure that I will hurry home as soon as the bishop is able to spare me."

Another week of weary waiting passed, and then came another letter, saying that Bishop Waldemar was much worse. His pneumonia had left his lungs in a weakened and diseased state, and it was feared that he was falling into a rapid decline.

"I must not desert my dear old friend in his extremity, beloved Berenice," wrote the young man, "but see him through. And then, however this may have ended, I will fly to you on wings of love."

"That means on board of an ocean steamer," put in Madam Journey, trying to cover with a jest the deep distress and anxiety she felt in hearing of Bishop Waldemar's illness.

At length, early in the month of March, the dreaded letter came, black-edged and black-sealed, and filled with the fatal news of Bishop Waldemar's death.

The venerable prelate had expired in an odor of sanctity, surrounded by the kind offices of friendship, and consoled by the holy sacraments of religion. His funeral had

been solemnized with all the imposing ceremonies of the Church, and his remains laid in a vault under one of the most ancient cathedrals of Rome. "And now, my own and only love, having discharged all these sacred duties to the sainted dead, I shall hasten home to you. Father Francis Carroll, whose health is much improved, will accompany me. Our passage is already taken on the steamer that sails for Havre next week. At Havre we shall take the steamer that leaves for New York on the seventeenth, so you may expect me with certainty about the first of April," wrote Vane in conclusion.

Alas for the selfish absorption of youthful love. All Berenice Brooke's grief for the death of the venerable Bishop Waldemar was lost in joyful anticipation of Vane Vandeleur's return home.

CHAPTER X.

STRANGE INCIDENTS.

VANE VANDELEUR, accompanied by Reverend Francis Carroll, embarked on board the great ocean steamer, the "Superior," bound from Havre to New York.

We did not follow our young friend abroad because his residence in a foreign land had really so little to interest us. Besides, we got news of him frequently through his letters to his love.

Now, however, we must meet him on board the steamer at Havre, and see him safely across the Atlantic, because the incidents of his homeward voyage are inextricably interwoven with the interest of our true story.

Father Francis Carroll and Vane Vandeleur had staterooms side by side and amidships.

But not until the steamer had sailed out of the harbor, not indeed until she had lost sight of France, did our voyagers leave the deck to go below.

Father Francis, who had become a greater devotee than ever, retired to his stateroom to go through certain offices of his calling.

Vane Vandeleur went to his room to examine a packet of documents left to him by Bishop Wademar.

The bulk of Vandeleur's baggage was, according to the rules and regulations of the steamship company in regard to such *"impedimenti,"* stowed below. But in his stateroom was a small leather travelling trunk that contained all the absolute necessaries of his voyage and also served, on occasion, as an extra seat.

From this trunk Vane took a sealed packet, directed to him in the handwriting of the late Bishop Waldemar. The characters of that writing were feebly and irregularly traced. They were evidently the last dying efforts of the hand that wrote. In the deep interest and excitement of the death scene and the funeral ceremonies, and in the hasty preparations for the voyage that followed immediately, Vane had scarcely looked at this packet, which had been placed in his hands by the venerable Father Pietro Colonna, the confessor of the dying bishop.

But now, in his first leisure, Vane held the packet in his hand, and as he gazed upon its superscripture, the tears blinded his eyes. He had loved Bishop Waldemar well.

Vane had lost both of his own parents before he had reached the age of seven years. And from that time until he had attained his majority he had been under the sole charge of Bishop Waldemar; he had leaned on him for support, looked up to him for instruction, and appealed to him for council in all the trials of his own young manhood.

Now his safe guide, his wise mentor, his loving friend was taken from him, and Vane felt as if some of the foundations of life had given way under him, and existence was all the more lonely, chilly and uncertain, because Bishop Waldemar was gone.

So, very often the young feel when their aged friends are taken away. For all that is said by selfish cynics, of the impatience of the heir to enter into his inheritance, I am quite certain, both from experience and observation, that in most cases *no inheritance* can compensate to the young for the deep sense of loss they feel in the death of a beloved parent or relative.

Vandeleur gained nothing by the death of Bishop Waldemar; but if he had inherited a dukedom from this dear friend, his regrets would have been as great as they now were; his tears would have fallen as fast as they now fell upon the tremulous lines of the superscription on that packet.

At length, with reverent hands he broke the seals, releasing from their envelope several written and folded papers.

The first that came at hand was a letter—a legacy-letter, from Bishop Waldemar to Vane Vandeleur. Evidently it had been dictated by the dying bishop, and penned by his confessor.

It was very long, and very loving; but a few extracts from it must serve our purpose.

From my Sick Chamber in the Vatican.
This 14th day of February.

I write, my dear Vane, by the hand of my spiritual guide, the Reverend Father Piedro Colonna, and I do so, to call your attention to certain documents that will accompany this letter, and also to give you more information about your family and your forefathers than even you possess.

We are scarcely yet historians here, where our history has been as brief as it is brilliant. Still less are we geneologists, in a country where it is the proudest boast of the greatest men that they have sprung from the people.

Thus it is that nothing was known to us of your family history prior to the establishment of your first recognized ancestor in Louisiana.

But during my late visit to Maryland, from certain old documents placed in my hands by Mrs. Jernyngham, and through comparing notes with that lady, I have learned more.

What I have learned you will already have surmised. Need I then tell you that your first Louisiana ancestor was the son of that famous Colonial naval commander, Captain Sir Veyne Vandeliere, who expired suddenly (as it

is said by poison,) while at the table of Lady Henniker; and of that martyred Indian princess, accused of her husband's murder, who fell by the hand of her own father, and was thus saved from farther ignominy.

You have already suspected this. If you ask yourself why I have not told you all this before, why I did not tell you during the long, monotonous mornings and evenings of our outward bound voyage, when we had so much leisure and opportunity for confidential conversation, I answer that it was because I wished to put all the heterogeneous mass of information I had received into good and intelligible order, before giving it into your hands. But ah! illness has intervened, and even now I can give you but an imperfect sketch of your family history.

Having satisfactorily established your descent from Captain Sir Veyne Vandeliere of Colonial celebrity, I traced back his history and geneology; and from Colonial records, state papers, and family documents, and also from "Burke's Peerage and Baronetage," an old copy of which was in the possession of Mrs. Jernyngham, I have learned certain facts that may interest and instruct you.

My dear Vane, from all that I can gather, it appears that your family have been "filibusters" from the beginning of time.

There is a remote tradition which tells us that a filibustering Roman soldier, named Vandolo, followed Julius Cæsar into Gaul, and there founded a family.

That more recently a filibustering Norman squire, Gaston de Vandeylure, followed William the Conqueror to England.

And there is history to prove that still more recently a filibustering English knight, Sir Veyne Vandeliere, accompanied Richard Calvert to Maryland, and his only son, Sir Cecil Vandeliere, a filibustering Marylander, went upon his own responsibility to French Louisana.

And we have seen with our own eyes, and in our own day, the last living representative of that long line of filibusters, a certain filibustering young Vane Vandeleur set forth with a party of mad adventurers to revolutionize Cuba—an expedition from which he barely escaped with

his life. But no more of that, my dear Vane. The total loss of your cause, the tragical death of Lopez, and the ruin of his companions have, I hope, effectually cured you of your family failing—filibustering. What I come to now breathes more of hope and happiness.

"Hope and happiness!" echoed Vane, mentally; but he went on with his letter.

And now, dear Vandeleur, I must address myself to your superstition, or I should rather say to the superstitious fears of your betrothed, which *I* believe you do not share, and which even she yet denies—acts upon. Granting, then, for the sake of argument, that this legendary malediction was really invoked by the widow of Sir Veyne Vandeliere upon the Lady of Henniker and her descendants, and that it has had the power to doom the daughters of that house to early widowhood, and by consequence, the men who should venture to marry them to early death, yet still I think I can point out a path to the reconciliation of all differences, which shall enable you to marry your betrothed without bringing upon her even the fear, much less the fate, of early widowhood, or upon yourself the doom of premature death.

Here, having reached the bottom of the page, Vane paused before turning it over, in suspended curiosity and wonder.

"What could the bishop's letter possibly suggest," he mentally inquired, "which should meet those impossible conditions of the Indian seer's oracle, without the fulfilment of which, he was sure, Berenice would never be brought to consent to marry him.

In something approaching to despair, he repeated the fatal lines that were forever fixed in his memory, and then with a deep sigh, and a slow sad shake of his head, he turned the page and resumed the reading of the letter.

And now attend, continued the bishop. All history, and all tradition have shown and proved that the readiest road to reconciliation between the two hostile houses is the intermarriage of their heirs and heiresses; so that

wherever the desire of such a reconciliation has existed among the elders, the young people have been induced to marry, for the sake of peace, even though there might have been but little love in the beginning. And such marriages have always been blessed, according to the Scriptures:

"Blessed are the peacemakers."

You and your betrothed are the last living heirs of the once hostile houses of Vandeleur and Henniker. You, who are the only responsible parties, desire the reconciliation; moreover, you love each other, and wish to marry. Marry, therefore, and believe that as sure as blessing is stronger than cursing, your marriage shall mar the malediction. And now, if after my arguments, drawn from religion, history and experience, it be not irreverent to bring in others still, from the superstitious imaginings of all ages, I would remind you that the magii of all countries have attached a fortunate augury to the seventh numeral. You are the seventh son, in direct descent, from Sir Veyne Vandeleire, and you bear his whole name. Your betrothed is the seventh daughter, in direct descent, from Berenice (Lady Henniker), and she bears her baptismal name. All auguries point to your marriage. Marry, therefore, and believe, that as sure as blessing is stronger than banning, your marriage shall raise the malediction, even supposing that it ever lowered over you. I repeat, my dear Vandeleur, that in what I write upon this subject, I address myself not so much to you, as to the unacknowledged superstitious fears of your betrothed, which constitute the only real obstacle to your marriage. Read this portion of my letter to her, and enforce it with all the arguments you can bring to back it; and I hope and believe they will be effectual in bringing about your mutual happiness. At least for this end, you have my best wishes and most fervent prayers.

There was but little more of the letter, only some warm expressions of affection, some wise and good counsel, and finally a solemn benediction.

And thus it ended.

Vandeleur's tears fell fast upon it. He was more moved by the deep love of his departed friend, than cheered by any hope that his arguments would prevail with Berenice. She had registered an awful oath to Heaven, that never until the impossible conditions of that oracle should be fulfilled, would she risk her lover's life by accepting his hand in marriage. And he knew, despite all the good bishop's wise reasoning, she would certainly keep her word.

He sat pondering over the bishop's letter and over his own singular position. He felt indisposed towards society, even the society of his companion of the voyage, Father Francis Carroll. So he sat, pondering until his reverie was interrupted by the entrance of the steward to light up the stateroom.

Soon after this the tea-bell rang, and Vandeleur left his stateroom and went to the saloon, where he joined Father Francis at their table.

After tea Father Francis, who in common with most of his fellow passengers, was beginning to suffer from sea sickness, retired to his stateroom.

Vane Vandeleur went up on deck and spent the whole evening in walking its full length fore and aft, and gazing on the boundless sea and blue-black, starlit sky. At twelve, midnight, he retired to his cabin and slept soundly, rocked by the motion of the ship till morning.

The day opened clear and bright, with a fair wind. The steamer flew on at the rate of ten knots an hour, and the captain, crew and passengers were all in fine spirits, for they had the prospect of a swift and safe passage home. Yet the voyage promised to be monotonous enough, without even the undesirable variety of a gale of wind.

"I might just as well have taken a trip on a canal boat!" complained a youngster who was on his first voyage, and longed above everything for the excitement of a storm at sea, and who on the seventh day out, stood looking discontentedly on the clear sky and calm ocean.

Vane, who was standing at his side, advised him to try and cross next time in the month of March, or of September, in either of which he might be gratified with any

amount of Equinoctial storms, combined with a healthy quantity of sea-sickness, and seasoned with some imminent danger to life.

But while Vane was "chafing" his ennuyée fellow voyager, there was preparing for him a series of surprises wholly disconnected with wind, wave, or shipwreck.

On the afternoon of that same day, while he walked with his companion on the deck, came the surgeon of the ship, who lifted his cap and addressed Father Francis, saying:

"You are a Catholic priest, I believe, sir?"

"I have the sacred privilege to be one, at your service," answered Mr. Carroll.

"Our ship's cook is very ill—fatally so, I fear; and, having heard that there is a priest in the first cabin, he earnestly desires his attendance," said the surgeon.

"I will go to him at once!" eagerly exclaimed Father Francis, who was always ready and anxious to fulfill the duties of his holy calling. "Or, at least," he added, meekly and hesitatingly, "I will go as soon as you will permit me to do so; for I know that you medical gentlemen will not, at all times and seasons, admit us to the bedside of your patients."

"Pardon me. We cannot always do so. There are 'times and seasons' when the life of a patient depends upon perfect quietness, and when the least excitement would prove fatal. Under such circumstances we are obliged to forbid the entrance into the sick chamber of any person, even of the clergyman."

"I know it, and I do not complain of it."

"But the case of our ship's cook is not such a one. He wants to see a priest; and your visit, I feel sure, will soothe rather than excite him," said the surgeon, lifting his cap again, and leading the way to the steerage.

"Will soothe rather than excite him?" That was what the surgeon had said, and that was all the short-sighted mortal knew of things invisible!

He took the priest down into the steerage, and opened the door of a small, plain, but clean, "cuddy," where the sick man lay calmly reclining on his berth.

Father Francis crossed himself, and bent over the patient, who then opened his eyes and looked up, when each simultaneously exclaimed:

"JOHN BROOKS!"

"MARSE JUDAH!"

First Father Francis instinctively looked around. But the surgeon had already retired and closed the cuddy door behind him. The priest was alone with the patient.

"Oh, Marse Judah, sir, does I see you here, alive and well, after all these years? Bless Heaven for the mercy, for, surely, I thought you was dead and gone, long ago!" exclaimed the old man, gazing in wonder upon his visitor.

"No, John! Only dead to the past!—dead to the world! Alive to the future and to the Lord, I hope. But, in truth, my poor fellow, I am quite as much surprised to meet you here as you could possibly be to see me. I thought you were comfortably provided for, in your little cabin on the old Brooke Farm. How is it that you are not?"

"Well, sir, my son, Stephen, married a free colored woman, and then set to work to buy himself; for you know, sir, he wasn't left free, as I was. So, to help him, poor fellow, I just turned over the cabin and the little bit of garden to him and his; and, as I was still good for something myself, I shipped as cook aboard of a steamboat, plying between Charleston and New York, and went several trips with them. And then, while at New York, I found out I could get higher wages, for the same work, aboard the ocean steamers, and so, sir, I applied to the agent, and was engaged on this here one, almost immediate. I have made two round trips on her, sir, and this is my third, and—my last!" said the sick man, sighing.

"Oh, I hope not! I hope you will still 'weather' this illness, as you sailors would say," kindly replied the priest.

"Thank you, sir; but I don't expect it. If I can manage to live to reach home, and die there, it is as much as I can hope for."

Here the patient was interrupted by a violent fit of coughing.

Father Francis, looking around, and seeing a bottle of

mucilaginous and composing medicine, poured some into a glass, and raised the head of the sufferer and put the glass to his lips. The medicine had a soothing effect, and the sick man's cough was calmed.

Then Father Francis sat down by the little bed, and said, cheerfully:

"There is no reason why you should not live to get home, and recover there. This disorder of yours seems to be a violent cold in the chest."

"No, sir—I beg your pardon, but it is an aggravation of an old cough, that has troubled me, at intervals, ever since I have lived North and followed the sea."

"Then, my poor fellow, you must keep up your spirits until you get home. And when you do, you must stay there; for, in that milder climate, you may recover your health."

"Lord grant it, sir; for we none of us don't want to die before our time comes, and mine ain't quite come yet neither; for I'm only fifty-five."

"But you wished to see a priest, I heard."

"Yes, sir, I did. But lor! seeing you, Marse Judah, has put it all out of my head."

"Why, my poor fellow, I am a priest."

"Why——" exclaimed John Brooks, lifting his head and looking at his visitor, and noticing for the first time that he wore the long-habit coat and the little square cap of the holy order. "So you is, and I didn't know it! So you'se entered the church, Marse Judah?"

"Yes, but not as 'Marse Judah.' My name is legally changed. Many events, both good and evil, have happened to me since that terrible time in Charleston, John, in which you and I were so much mistaken, and in which we both, through our mistakes, committed such great wrongs."

"We did! Oh, Marse Judah, we did! But it was fate! it was fate! At least with me; for I was doomed to do what I did!" exclaimed the invalid, suddenly clasping his hands and rolling his eyes in great emotion.

"John, John, my poor fellow, you are talking wildly," said the priest soothingly.

"No, no, Marse, Judah! when I tells you all you will see how it was fate! And that is what I wanted to see a priest for! And I should have wanted to see *you* too, if I had known you had been in the land of the living. But to see a priest and you at the same time in the same person is a blessing I never should have looked for. Will you tell me what made you turn priest, Marse Judah, if you don't think the question is an impident one, which it isn't meant to be, but comes along of the great intrust I take in you, sir," said the sick man, fixing his great hollow eyes full upon his visitor's face.

"Certainly I will tell you, John. But I must make a short story of it, for it is too sorrowful to dwell upon, and besides, you are too weak to hear a long recital," gently replied the priest.

"Yes sir; and besides all *that*, I have something to say to you which must be said while my strength lasts. Go on, sir, please."

In as few words as the tale could be told, the priest put the patient in possession of all that had transpired since their separation;—his legal change of name; marriage with the Scotch heiress; inheritance, jointly with her, of the Highland estate; sea-voyage; shipwreck; loss of wife and children; and subsequent entrance into holy orders and recovery of his long-lost daughter.

The priest told the tale calmly and coolly, as well as briefly. He did not wish to excite his patient.

"What a life of sorrows!" exclaimed John Brooks, when he had heard it all. "What a life of sorrows crowded into a few short years! I am a poor ignorant man, sir, and yet it seems to me you have expiated your share of our great sin in this world, as I shall have to expiate it in the next! And yet Heaven knows that sin was forced upon me by fate!"

"John! John! say not so! No sin is forced upon us."

"Sir! Sir! You shall hear, and then judge. I have something now to say to you."

"Say on. I am listening."

The sick man plunged immediately into his story.

"Many people thought, because of the likeness," he

said, "that I, John Brooks, was the son of old Mr. Brooke, Marse Raphael's father. It was not so. The likeness came *through* my mother, though it didn't come out in her. *She* was a mulatto, and the daughter of Marse Raphael's great uncle, old Mr. Somerville Brooke, the old bachelor, who lived and died in Maryland."

"Ah," said the priest, "I knew that she had once belonged to that old gentleman, and at his death, and the division of his estate among his nieces and nephews, she fell to the share of my mother, and was taken from her Maryland home to Mississippi. I say I know it, but I should rather say, that I have heard it; for all these events happened before my day."

"Yes, sir, very long before your day."

"But it is not of my poor gentle mother that I wished to speak, but of my father. Sir, my father was an Indian chief."

"An Indian chief!" exchoed Father Francis, in astonishment.

"An Indian chief. I scarcely knew the fact myself, so brief had been his union with my mother, who was torn from him at the time of her removal from Maryland to Mississippi, when I was an infant of a few months old. So I knew nothing of my father until I was about fifteen years of age, when, one day, into our cabin on the old Brakeman estate, walked a swarthy savage, bent with illness and premature old age. It was the worn out Indian chief, who, after all these years had at last followed and found his wife and son."

"Ah! poor soul!" compassionately breathed the priest.

"But do you think it was affection that brought him to us? Ah no!" said the sick man, shaking his head.

"What, then—necessity?"

"No, nor necessity. It was a legacy that he had to leave to his son."

"Then he must have loved his son, to crawl so far to leave him a legacy."

"Ah, something more than a legacy—an inheritance—an inheritance that had come down to me from five generations—an inheritance of malice—an inheritance of

vengeance—of vengeance against the unoffending daughters of one hated house," said the sick man, bitterly.

"Heaven and Earth! I see it all now," exclaimed the priest, in horror.

"No, sir, you do not see it all, if you suspect that I ever accepted that black mission of destruction and did what I did do to accomplish it. No, sir; but the doom was on me too. I acted blindly, fatally, when I also helped to work out the curse against the daughters of the house of Henniker," said John Brooks, earnestly.

"Go on, go on," cried the priest, covering his face with his hands.

"My father, feeling his health declining, had come there to seek out his son, solely for the purpose of bequeathing that bitter heirloom. Not at first did he tell us of it. My poor, gentle mother, who had been faithful to his memory all these years, received him with wonder and a great joy. My master and mistress, finding out that he was the husband of one of their favorite servants, gave him the run of the place and in other respects treated him well as long as he lived."

"My father and mother could scarcely have done otherwise," said the priest, in a low voice.

"No, Marse Judah, they could not, for it was not in their nature to treat any needy creature any way but kindly. The poor Indian did not live long to tax their goodness. He was dying of consumption—the same complaint that is killing me now," sighed the sick man, despondently.

"No, no; you must not think so hopelessly of your state. Consumption is no longer an incurable complaint," said the priest, encouragingly.

Slowly and sadly the sick man shook his head, and then continued his discourse:

"My father, at all events, was dying, for consumption was not curable in his day, at least. He was dying and he knew it. But before he passed away, he took an opportunity to tell me the traditions of his lost and scattered tribe, and especially of that one which was handed down

from father to son in his own direct line—the hereditary hatred of one house."

The priest uttered an irrepressible groan, but the patient continued:

"My father told me that he was the fifth lineal descendant from Eagle Eye, the great chief of the Pocomocos, famous in Colonial times for their friendship for the Colonists—friendship most foully betrayed, as was too often the case between the two races in those early times."

"And in these latter days, too, more's the pity," added the priest.

"Eagle Eye, king of the Pocomocos, had a daughter called the Shining Star, the most beautiful, most majestic, most grandly-gifted Indian princess that had ever lived since the days of the illustrious Anacoana, Queen of Xaraguay. This resplendant Shining Star won the heart of one of the most distinguished cavaliers of the colony—Captain Sir Veyne Vandeliere."

"Yes, yes, I know! I have heard the whole of that horrible story. Skip it, and come on to your own experience," groaned Father Francis.

"You have heard how Sir Veyne was poisoned by the haughty Lady Henniker in her attempt to destroy her rival—his Indian wife?"

"Yes! yes!"

"How the Indian princess was falsely accused, tried and condemned for the murder of her husband, and only saved from an ignominious death by the arrow of the Eagle Eye?"

"Yes, yes! And I have also heard how the widowed Indian princess laid the curse of widowhood upon all the daughters descended from Lady Henniker foever."

"That is just what I wished to know. For you have *not* heard what my father then told me: That the old chief Eagle Eye left as a legacy to his line forever, to be carefully handed down from father to son, the injunction to see that the fell curse of the martyred Indian widow should be carried out on the daughters of the house of Henniker in every generation of that doomed race."

"Oh, the horrible, horrible vengeance! worthy only of the savage minds that conceived and consummated it," groaned the priest, with a shudder.

"Sir," continued John Brooks, who, instead of becoming exhausted in the relation of his terrible story, seemed—either from the excitement of narration, or from the relief of unburthening his mind, or from both causes combined—really to grow stronger as he proceeded—"Sir, that curse has been carried out! In every successive generation there has been found a son of the line of old Eagle Eye to ensure the widowhood of a cotemporary daughter of the hated house of Henniker. The husband has been always a marked man doomed to destruction. In the crowded city's streets, in the lonely forest paths, on the battlefild, on the frigate's deck—not fairly, in the fight, with an honest foeman, but fatedly, by the stealthy and treacherous hand of vengeance."

"And you accepted that terrible legacy of blood! Oh my Lord! If ever a sin could be too great for thy pardon, surely this would be one!" cried the priest, clasping his hands, and shuddering with horror.

The sick man gazed at the bitter speaker in silent amazement for a moment, and then said in a tone of mournful reproach:

"You have known me from your boyhood, sir, and you can say that of me!"

"Oh! have I known *myself* as long, and yet what have I not known myself to do!" sighed the priest.

"Nothing, a millionth part as bad as you have accused me of doing! No sir, I did not accept the black trust! I think I told you so before! Being only half an Indian, and having more of my Christian mother's gentle nature than of my Pagan father's savage one, I could not accept it. I utterly refused and repudiated it, then and there, and implored my father to forsake such mad and wicked designs, and to seek forgiveness for his own sins, and salvation for his own soul."

"And did the fierce chief listen to you?"

"Listen to me? He cursed *me* then! He told me that whether I would or not, I was doomed to carry out the

curse upon the cotemporary daughter of the house of Henniker. And so he died! His death, no doubt, accelerated by the fury into which he threw himself, on being opposed by me. Oh, Marse Judah! you know what followed. I, even I, who so utterly repelled the foul trust—I was fated blindly, ignorantly, to carry out the curse of early widowhood on the sixth descendant of Lady Henniker."

The priest covered his face with his hands, and wept.

"My father died and was buried, and changes soon came that almost made me forget the brief, black passage of his existence among us, or remember it only as a nightmare dream. First came the great sorrow of my life—the loss of my beloved mother. She fell a victim to one of those fierce fevers of the south, that carry off scores every year. She was your nurse, Marse Judah; but you were but a babe then, too young to remember her."

"Yet I have a shadowy vision if not a memory of a sweet dark face and soothing voice, that used to hover around my cradle," said the priest.

"The next change," continued John Brooks, "was 'the beginning of the end.' Your father had had money troubles. At length his plantation had to be sold to strangers, but his people were saved so far as they were bought up by his brother-in-law, Colonel Brooke, of Charleston, South Carolina. I was bought among the rest. Your father then volunteered for the army that was then about to invade Mexico, and with a captain's commission he went thither. Your mother with yourself, an infant under three years old, accompanied her brother, Colonel Brooke, to Charleston. I was also glad to be taken with them because I had become so much attached to you, my little master and foster-brother. Your memory must have begun to record events about that time, Marse Judah."

"Oh, yes, I remember—vaguely as the fantastical pageantry of a dream—I remember the shifting scenes of the journey North. The strange new home. And then a lapse of time. And then the news of my father's death—in battle! And my mother's grief, and her black dress.

And then, confused with that, because of the black, I suppose, comes the vision of my mother's own funeral, and the gloom and sorrow and darkness that enveloped all things. But I do not remember her illness at all."

"It was a decline too gradual to have made any impression on your infant mind. She never got over the shock of your father's sudden death. She wasted away, from the day that she received the fatal news, and died within the year. Then you and I alone were left, of all who had come from the beautiful Mississippi plantation to the South Carolinian city. And now, Marse Judah, you must remember clearly all that followed after?"

"Oh, I do! I do! I wish to Heaven I could forget it!"

"All?—how I loved you, and disliked your cousin, Raphael Brooke, because he was always preferred before you, and put above you?"

"Yes! Yes! Lord forgive us both!"

"And how, out of my love for you, and jealousy of him, and from the darkness of his complexion, and the uncertainty that hung about his mother's history, I began to persuade myself that all was not right? That Marse Raphael had no lawful claim to the name of Brooke, and that you, the nephew, was the true lawful heir. And how I, also, at last, persuaded you to think so, too? And how we set our heads together to pull down the false heir, as we supposed him to be, and to put up the true heir, as we supposed you to be? And how, after the death of Colonel Brooke and his wife, we actually succeeded in pulling down Raphael—aye, even to death and the grave—but not in putting up you?"

"Lord forgive us! I remember! I remember! Would to heaven that I could forget!"

"Oh, take comfort, Marse Judah! It was not your fault. It was in my fate to do that deed, and to draw you into complicity with it!"

"Brooks!"

"Yes, sir, it was! In all these years spent in Charleston—what between the change of scene and circumstances, and my love of you and jealousy of your cousin, and our plots and contrivances, I had forgot all about that ac-

cursed legacy of vengeance to be wreaked on that unknown young heiress of Henniker, of whose very residence I was ignorant. Judge then of the amazement, the consternation and horror I felt, when at the death of Mr. Raphael Brooke I discovered that his young widow was Rosamond Dering, the only daughter of that Colonial Dering, whom my father, following out the hereditary vengeance, had pursued, picked out and slain, under the cover of a skirmish on the prairies! And that despite of my earnest, solemn, conscientious rejection of the charge, I had ignorantly, blindly, fatally carried out the curse by inflicting widowhood upon the doomed daughter of Henniker!"

"Oh, Heaven! this is too awful to reflect upon! It would shake the incredulity, even of the most incredulous!" groaned the priest.

"And now, sir," pursued the patient, "what I wish to say to you is this: I have heard, because I have taken pains to inquire, that Mrs. Rosamond Brooke has a daughter. Can you confirm or contradict this report? Oh, I could almost pray you to contradict it!"

"I must confirm it! She has a lovely daughter, as good and wise as she is fair. Moreover, that daughter has a betrothed husband, who is my fellow passenger on this ship, and is every way worthy of the prize he has gained.

"Oh Heaven! are these things so? Tell him to take her away from this country, and conceal himself in some foreign land!" exclaimed John Brooks, speaking with more excitement than he had yet betrayed. "Tell him to beware of my son, his unconscious natural enemy. To beware of a gentle, good-natured young man, who does not even know his name, but yet who is doomed to deal destruction upon him, as ignorantly, as blindly, as fatally as I dealt it upon his wife's father! Tell him—but why try to turn aside the tide of fate?—for sure as the earth stands, my easy-tempered, good-hearted Stephen, who does not dream of such a dreadful deed, is doomed to be the death of that young man! It was to unburthen my mind of this trouble, and to try and avert these threatened evils, that I wished to consult a priest before I came to die.

Oh, Marse Judah! As you know all about this great distress, and have an interest in it, besides being a priest also, oh! warn them both, and watch over them both, though they are so far apart in rank, and in space. Oh, offer prayers and masses for both! Oh, try and save my good son from predestined sin, and the lovely young lady from unmerited sorrow!"

"Compose yourself, poor fellow. The past is irretrievable, but the future may be ours. Believe that they will both be saved. Believe in the efficacy of prayer, and in the triumph of good."

"What I have told you, Marse Judah, I have told for the good of all concerned, and you may use it as you please. But now I would like to ease my soul with the confession of my sins towards our Lord."

"Right. But now you must drop 'Marse Judah,' and call me Father Francis, the name under which I entered the Church."

"Yes, Father Francis," meekly replied the penitent.

"And now, my son, I hope that you have prepared your soul for this solemn sacrament of confession by the recoltion of and the meditation on your duties to the Lord, to your fellow beings, and to your own soul, and your great sin against all these."

"I have endeavored to do so, my Father."

"Proceed then, my son."

The sick man entered upon the confession of his faults, and in due course received the priest's absolution for the same, together with much good counsel and benediction. And then Father Francis administered the cough medicine prescribed by the doctor for the patient, and left the latter to repose.

When Mr. Carroll rejoined Vandeleur on the deck, the sun was setting in magnificent glory, sending a pathway of crimson fire across the ocean. As the priest stood gazing silently upon the splendid spectacle, Vandeleur supposed that he was absorbed in the gorgeous beauty of the scene and so he forbore to interrupt him until the sun—a huge ball of glowing fire—suddenly dropped down

below the horizon, drawing down after it a long line of living light that had lately flamed across the waters.

Then the young man spoke to the priest:

"I hope, Father Francis, that your penitent is not dangerously ill?"

"He is in no immediate danger. Come aft with me, for a few moments, out of the hearing of all these people," whispered the priest.

And when Vane had complied with his request, the priest said:

"You will be astonished to hear that this ship's cook, who sent for me to shrive him, is no other than my own old confederate—John Brooks."

"John Brooks!" exclaimed Vandeleur, in consternation.

"The very same. The rencounters in this world are indeed, most extraordinary."

"Did he know you?"

"He knew me; but not otherwise than as the 'Marse Judah' of former days. I had to make him understand the change, by explaining to him all that had happened since I had lost sight of him. And, in return, he made a revelation that, I do assure you, my young friend, has shaken even my incredulity in respect to that legendary malediction of Henniker; and were it not for my Christian faith would convert me to a full belief in its fatality."

"For Heaven's sake, what did John Brooks tell you?" anxiously inquired Vandeleur.

In reply, Mr. Carroll related all that had passed between himself and the sick man.

And for the first time, since he had heard of the malediction, Vandeleur's own mind was overshadowed, as by a cloud from the unseen world, and he was oppressed with a superstitious awe.

The patient grew neither better nor worse, for the few days that remained of the voyage.

And nothing worth recording happened, until they were within about twelve hours' sail of New York, when one fine morning, they were boarded by the pilot, with the fresh news so eagerly sought after by the homesick pas-

sengers, who crowded around him, to get possession of the daily papers he had brought.

Vandeleur got a copy of the "Intelligencer," and hurried off to another part of the deck to read it. He greedily devoured the Congressional debates, the local news, the police reports, the personal notices, and then—so great was his appetite still, he actually turned to the marriages and deaths.

There his eyes were arrested by a name that transfixed him to the spot, and with blanched face and staring orbs he read this:

Married—At Forest Lodge, on the fifteenth of March, by the Reverend Pierre Bonhomme, of St. Rosalie's Chapel, Mr. Basil Wall to Miss Berenice Brooke, both of St. Mary's.

CHAPTER XI.

VANDELEUR THUNDERSTRUCK.

Married—At Forest Lodge, on the fifteenth of March, by the Reverend Pierre Bonhomme, of St. Rosalie's Chapel, Mr. Basil Wall to Miss Berenice Brooke, both of St. Mary's.

VANDELEUR read this over a second time, staring at the printed characters as if he would have stared them through the paper, and out of existence. But they did not disappear for all that. There they stood, confronting, amazing, overpowering him. Yet he could not receive it as truth. He continued to stand and stare at it—aghast!

"What is the matter? What do you find there to astonish you so much?" inquired Mr. Francis Carroll, joining him.

"Look there! Read that! Tell me if I have read the lines aright. What is the meaning of them? And—oh! if I could wake up!" This last exclamation burst from Vandeleur with a groan, as he struck his forehead hard, and then bent over Mr. Carroll's shoulder, to trace again with him the incredible lines of that marriage notice.

"*What* do you make of that?" demanded Vane, in suppressed fierceness.

"I—I—always thought she was engaged to you!" exclaimed Father Francis, in astonishment.

"She was. Of course she was. Everybody knew it. And now!—and now! My Heaven! It is not true! I have nightmare! Shake me! Wake me up! I cannot bear this dreadful dream!" cried the distracted lover.

"Try to be quiet, Mr. Vandeleur. It is a great shock, doubtless, to meet you just on the eve of landing. But try to bear up under it," said the priest, soothingly.

Vane complied with his advice by utterly giving way, and sinking upon the nearest seat, and leaning against the bulwarks.

"I never could have believed it," continued Father Francis—"I never could have believed that Berenice Brooke could have behaved with so much treachery and duplicity."

"Oh! it will not bear to be thought of. Not for one instant!" exclaimed Vane, plucking at his hair, and starting up.

"My dear young friend, you must come down into the cabin, or else control yourself here. You will attract an unpleasant degree of observation," said the priest, seriously.

"Oh! what do I care for that? Oh! what do I care for anything?" broke forth the agonized lover. "I this ship were to take fire now, I should not care even to choose my death between one element and the other, or to save myself, or any one else, from either! Married! My Berenice married! And to that detestable young—Oh! Oh! Oh!" he groaned, dropping once more upon his seat.

"I always thought she cared for that young fellow, until she saw you. I thought she would have married him. I believed then that he was her first love. I feel sure, now, that he was her first and her only one. Her transient regard for you, Mr. Vandeleur, was only one of those ephemeral fancies to which, unfortunately, some light natures are prone. Though *I* did not think Berenice Brooke

one of those. But now she has married her first and only love. Look the matter rationally and firmly in the face, Mr. Vandeleur, and bear your disappointment like a man!"

"I will avenge it like a devil!" burst forth Vane, all his hot, Southern blood aflame. "I will confront them both with their falsehood! I will reproach her, and challenge him; and by the soul of my Indian ancestress, unless he first kills me, there shall be another retribution wreaked upon the deceitful daughters of Henniker. There shall be another Widow of Widowville. Ah! one can understand the meaning of the malediction when one sees such treachery!"

"Vandeleur, my dear young friend, you talk wildly and wickedly. That is not like you. Pray go with me to the cabin. Do you not see that people are looking this way?" said the priest, laying his hand upon the young man's shoulder.

"Take me where you will. I do not care, until I reach the land, what becomes of me! But when I do set foot upon my native shores again—then!—yes, then!—I will teach that false and treacherous man and woman what falsehood and treachery sometimes cost!"

With some difficulty in avoiding observation, Father Francis drew Vane Vandeleur along the crowded deck and down into the cabin, where the young lover's despair underwent another phase. He threw himself down upon his berth, covered his face with his hands, and lay perfectly still and silent, but for the convulsive heavings of his chest, and the pent-up, struggling agony that escaped in half-suppressed groans.

The well-meaning priest sometimes talked platitudes. With the very best intentions he now sat down by the side of the victim, and tortured him afresh with a great many commonplace axioms on the vanity of man's wishes; the uncertainty of human affairs; the fickleness of woman; the uselessness of despair.

Of course this was all worse than wasted breath. Vandeleur lost patience, and temper, and first implored, and then commanded his comforter to leave him alone. And

when the priest was gone, the lover lay wrestling in silence with the great agony that filled, and threatened to subdue his soul. He lay there, refusing all comfort and refreshment. At dinner time, Father Francis came, to take him to the saloon, but Vandeleur refused to leave his berth, and indeed almost drove the priest from his presence. At tea time the same scene was enacted. In the evening the weather changed, and became so inclement as to confine all the passengers to the cabins.

Then, Vandeleur, with disordered clothing, and dishevelled hair, crept up to the deserted deck and walked its whole length, from stem to stern, under the dark sky and drizzling rain, until the dawn of day. Then, as he knew they were very near New York, he went down into his stateroom to prepare for landing. He had but one impulse—to lose not a single instant of time, but to be ready, immediately on touching at Jersey City, to catch the first train for Baltimore, and fly south, to confront that false woman, and punish that foresworn man. Ah! very short should be their dream of wedded bliss!

By the time Vane Vandeleur had completed his morning toilet and packed his portmanteau with everything necessary for a sudden land journey, it was broad day.

Unable to bear, at any time, the close confinement of the cabin, and indeed restless everywhere since that fatal blow had fallen on him, he went up on deck.

After the night of clouds and rain, the sun was rising gloriously, flooding the clear blue sky and calm blue sea with a perfectly dazzling effulgence of light.

But the deck was deserted by all, except the pilot, the man at the wheel, and the officer of the watch.

His happier fellow-passengers were still sleeping, "rocked in the cradle of the deep."

Land was in sight, and the steamer was rapidly approaching Sandy Hook; the harbor and shipping of the distant city were visible, and its spires were glistening in the rays of the rising sun.

Vane stood leaning over the bulwarks of the ship and looking gloomily towards the land. What a different

coming home was this from that which he had anticipated!

While he was still plunged in his dark reverie, he was suddenly joined by Father Francis.

"A glorious morning for our arrival, Mr. Vandeleur! Our lovely native shores and skies seem to smile on us a warm welcome," said the priest, rubbing his hands with what was in him a very unusual degree of self-congratulation—"do you not feel it so?" he briskly inquired, turning to his silent companion.

"No, I do not, Father Francis. To me these blooming shores seem very desolate; these bright skies very dreary; this vast, thickly peopled country, lonely—lonely—lonely—because of the loss of one woman!" sighed Vandeleur.

"Ah! I am very sorry to find you still so deeply affected by your disappointment. I had hoped this glorious morning and the sight of your native land would have cheered your spirits up," said Father Francis.

Before Vane could reply they were joined by a fellow passenger, whose presence put a stop to all confidential conversation between the companions, and whose politeness also became a little embarrassing. As, for instance, he said with great courtesy:

"I did not see you at the table during the whole of yesterday, Mr. Vandeleur. I hope you were not indisposed."

"I was not very well; and I was certainly indisposed to make my appearance at table. But I thank you for being so good as to miss me, Mr. Jones," smiled Vane; for he was one of those who *could* smile and even jest while his heart might be breaking.

"Oh, don't mention it. But I am very glad to see you out this morning. We shall drop anchor in an hour. I wonder if they mean to give us our breakfast before we land. You know they shirk this expense whenever they can, and if we should reach the pier about the breakfast hour, we should not be likely to get any breakfast. What do *you* think, Mr. Vandeleur?"

Vane was quite unable to offer any ideas on the subject, and he said so. Father Francis was equally incapable of

making any suggestion. But the problem was soon solved by the ringing of the breakfast bell.

"There, they're a set of good fellows, after all!" exclaimed the anxious passenger, turning quickly, and making tracks for the saloon. His example was followed by all his fellow voyagers.

Even Vane Vandeleur yielded to Father Francis Carroll's persuasions, and went down to the breakfast table to get a cup of coffee.

Before that pleasant, and protracted morning meal was over, the steamship had reached her pier, and anchored.

Then there was a hasty scrambling up on deck.

"If it were not for that infernal custom house bother, I should have time to catch the ten o'clock train for Baltimore," a voice grumbled at Vane's elbow.

"Is there a train goes at ten?" inquired Vandeleur.

"Yes, and if it was not for this cursed custom house bother——"

But Vane had heard enough. He rushed down into his stateroom, seized his portmanteau and umbrella, and rushed back on deck. And scarcely waiting to take leave of Father Francis, he left his luggage to the care of his ignorant servant, quite indifferent as to whether that valuable domestic should contrive to get it passed through, or confiscated by the custom house officers. And thus he was the first passenger to cross the gangplank, and set his foot upon the shore. He made haste to catch the required train, and reached the station just in time to catch a glimpse of its vanishing smoke, as it disappeared in the distance.

He felt this as a dreadful disappointment. In the excited state of his nerves, all delay seemed insufferable.

"When does the next train leave for Baltimore, and Washington?" he inquired, at the little sliding window of the ticket office.

"At eight o'clock this evening," answered the worried ticket clerk, who was wearily closing up the office.

With a dreary sigh, Vandeleur turned away and retraced his steps to the ship, with the intention of rejoining his companion.

"HERALD!' 'TIMES!' 'WORLD!'" shouted a newsboy rushing by with a bundle of papers under his arm. Then with his practised eyes, recognizing a newly arrived passenger, he suddenly pulled up, and thrust the whole bundle towards Mr. Vandeleur, with a bob, and a——

"Morning paper, sir?"

Very languidly and more from habitual benevolence, than from any interest in the news of the day, Vane purchased a paper from the child and passed on, perusing it mechanically as he went. He was lazily looking over the arrivals at the hotels—for indeed, he felt no more concern in the comings and goings of the world, than he did in any other of its proceedings, when—Ah! what is this?

St. James Hotel, Mr. and Mrs. Basil Wall, the Misses Wall, Mrs. Jernyngham, Maryland.

They were in New York then! They were in New York! Fate had brought them there to meet the wronged lover, on the very day of his arrival! They were probably on a wedding tour! Ah! how soon their insolent joy should be turned to confusion and sorrow! though Vane Vandeleur, as he ground his teeth together, as if he would have pulverized them; and instead of going towards the ship he turned and made a bee-line towards the ferry boat, and jumped aboard, just as she was putting off.

But oh! never did a boat seem to move so slowly, or time to pass so heavily. Yards seemed drawn out into miles, and minutes into hours. In his impetuosity he would have flown, if he could. But in due time, and in no more nor no less, the boat reached her New York pier, and the passengers poured forth.

Vane hailed a hackney coach, jumped into it, and told the coachman to drive for life and death to the St. James Hotel, and his fare should be doubled.

The man spared neither whip nor horse flesh, and so in something like half the usual time, drew up before the hotel. Vandeleur sprang down, and hurried into the office.

"Mr. and Mrs. Basil Wall?" he exclaimed, scarcely able to repress his excitement.

The clerk, though used to all manner of strange customers, looked at this one so curiously, that Vane felt the necessity of controlling himself, according to the requirements of civilized society. So he amended his phraseology a little and said:

"I beg pardon, Mr. and Mrs. Basil Wall, and party, are stopping here, I believe?"

The clerk turned to his books and examined his list, and then answered:

"They arrived yesterday and left this morning."

"Left?" exclaimed Vane.

"Yes, sir, this morning."

"For what place?"

"I do not know, but I can inquire," said the clerk, calling one of the porters to the desk—"Michael," he continued, "can you tell this gentleman where the large parties that were in numbers 80, 81 and 82 went this morning?"

"Yes, sir, they took the Boston train," answered the man.

Here was another damper. But Vane thanked the clerk, and went out and re-entered the hack, and ordered the coachman to drive him back to the Jersey City ferry.

He felt that he could not now do better than to go back to the unlading steamship and see to his travelling companion and his servant. But when he reached the ferry the boat had just put off, so he had a half hour or so left upon his hands.

He paid and dismissed the hack, and then sauntered about among the crowded piers while waiting for the return of the ferry boat.

Suddenly his eyes were attracted by the running up of a white flag or banner from a brig at the pier, with this notice:

"The Carrier, Thomas Storms, Master, for Alexandria, Georgetown, and Washington. For freight and passage, apply on board."

"Captain Storms here! How fortunate. I shall hear all about this accursed business now," exclaimed Vane,

as again, at the sight of that notice his purpose was changed.

In the unsettled state of his mind he was blown about by every breeze of impulse, so that now instead of waiting for the ferry boat and going over to the steamship to look after his neglected friend and servant, he hastened towards the brig, and jumped on board so suddenly that he actually ran afoul of old Captain Storms, who was on the deck.

"Good gracious, Mr. Vandeleur! Is this you? Is it really? When did you arrive? And my lord, man, next time you board my ship don't butt my breast. You have pretty nearly knocked the breath out of my body. But when did you get here, eh? By the steamship Superior this morning, I suppose, eh? Well, I'm very glad to see you, and that's a fact," exclaimed the old captain, uttering welcomes, asking questions, and making remarks in his usual gusty and impetuous manner without waiting for any reply.

"Thanks for your very warm welcome," smiled Vane, cordially grasping the old seaman's hand, though his own heart was ready to burst, with rage, grief, and despair.

"You came in the Superior then, eh?" heartily demanded the captain.

"Yes."

"Good weather? Pleasant voyage? Quick passage? eh?"

"Never better."

"Glad to hear it! And very glad to see you come back so well! But now I look at you good, I'm blest if I think you *are* so well! You look as if you had buried every friend you have in the world, and were preparing to follow them! What in the deuce is the matter, man? You —can't have had time, since your arrival, to have heard— any—very bad news, can you?" anxiously inquired the captain, while he carefully scrutinized the face of his visitor.

"I do not know, Captain Storms, whether you would call it bad news, for a man to hear that his betrothed wife,

the woman he had loved and trusted, with his whole heart and soul, had cheated and jilted him! You may think a man in such a case, well rid of such a woman! Yet the lesson is a sharp one!" said Vane, bitterly.

"Then you *have* heard the news! And that is what has upset you so!" exclaimed the captain, sympathetically.

"Yes, my friend, I have the news! It greeted me at the very threshold of my native country!"

"And who the blazes had the smartness to tell you? Blowed if I wouldn't like to punch his head, whoever he was!" exclaimed the old man in a heat.

Vane smiled.

"It was the newspaper that told me," he said, drawing the one in question from his pocket, and pointing out the notice to the captain.

"Well then! Do you know I never saw that notice before? And, yet, of course I knew it must have been put in the papers, too! Well, sir! I have lived a long time in this world! I have met a great many queer people, and seen some rum things in my life! but I'm blest if ever I was so taken aback in all my days, as I was by that match!"

"It took place before you left Maryland, then?"

"Of course it did! But only *just* before! If you would like to hear all the particulars, I'll tell them to you. I shouldn't have mentioned the matter at all, mind you, if you hadn't already heard it. But since you have received the first shock of the news, I might as well tell you all I know about it, if you would like to hear," said the captain, whom the reader knows to have been an inveterate gossip.

"Yes, I should like to hear," Vane admitted.

"Then come down into the cabin, and let us be comfortable there. I can leave the deck in charge of my mate, and take an hour or two of rest there with you as well as not," said the old skipper, leading the way below, and followed by Vane.

"This reminds one of old times. Don't you remember how we used to sit, and smoke, and spin yarns at this very table, on that voyage down the Chesapeake, last winter?"

"I remember well," said Vane.

"All right. We'll do the same thing again this afternoon, in memory of those old times," said the captain heartily, as he unlocked his beaufet and took from it decanters, glasses, pipes, and tobacco, and set them on the table.

"There, now, Mr. Vandeleur, try that. Fill yourself a stiff bumper, and drink confusion to all deceivers. Don't be afraid of it, man. It's pure Cogniac, never been contaminated by contact with the custom house," said the old man, pushing one particular decanter towards his guest.

"Smuggled, Captain?" archly inquired Vandeleur.

"Hush! Don't use bad words. But we can't help a little free-trading. It comes as natural to us old sea-dogs as downright thieving does to all the rest of mankind. Besides, we old salts, who risk our lives every day in the interests of commerce, think we have a right to a little compensation of this kind. Come, try the Cogniac, and don't be afraid of it," urged the captain.

"Thanks, no; I think I will not take anything," said Vane.

"But you need it. You do indeed. Look at yourself. You never had much color to boast of, to be sure, but now you have none at all. You are just as white as a sheet. Try the Cogniac, Mr. Vandeleur."

"Thanks, Captain, no, I think you'll have to excuse me. I know you will, when I tell you why I decline the brandy. It is because I am in just that dangerous state of mind, when a man flies to alcohol, or to opium, to distract or stupefy his sense of pain. With the help of Heaven, I will avoid both. But you may give me a glass of fair water, for my throat is really parched," said Vane, apolegetically.

"Well, now, that's what I call blamed unsociable, to refuse to drink with an old friend."

"I do not refuse to drink with you, I only decline the use of liquors, which I dare not touch now, for the reasons I have stated. But I will drink your health in pure

water, with great pleasure, if you will allow me," said Vane.

"Well, well, just as you please, but as for me, I have water enough all around me, without pouring any down into me," chuckled the old man, as he filled a glass of that healthful beverage for Vane, and another of brandy for himself.

"Now," said the captain, taking a seat at the table, and inviting Vane to follow his example. "Now, I'll tell you all about that deceitful little minx's marriage."

"Stop, for Heaven's sake! Do not speak of her in that way? I loved and honored her so much once! And Heaven help me, I love her so much still. I, even I, deeply wronged as I have been, I cannot bear to characterize her conduct as it deserves."

"All right, I'll be very careful not to tread on your tender toes. Well, then, I'll tell you all about that faithful little beauty's marriage."

"No, no sarcasm either if you love me, Captain Storms."

"Now, what the deuce would you have? There's no such thing as pleasing you. Shall I tell you about Miss Berenice Brooke's wedding, then? Will that do?"

"That will do, my friend."

"I wasn't at it, to begin with. I wasn't invited; and I wouldn't have gone if I had been. No, I'm blowed if I would! Not if Madam Journey herself had superintended the preparations for the wedding breakfast, and all the Widows of Widowville had been present at it. For I do despise deceit, and decidedly that girl did deceive you, and all of us most shamefully."

Vandeleur groaned deeply.

"Take a little more brandy. Keep your spirits up by pouring spirits down. Take a little more."

Vane shook his head.

"Oh, I forgot, you didn't take any, and you wouldn't. Well, have your own way."

"Pray, go on."

"I'm going. Well, as I said before, I wouldn't have gone to that wicked wedding even if it had been the grandest affair that ever was, and I had been begged

and entreated to go. But there was nothing of the sort. The wedding was strictly private, as if they were all ashamed of it, as indeed upon my soul they ought to have been."

Vandeleur involuntarily nodded assent.

"The news came on me like a thunder-clap. For I thought she was devoted to you, do you see, and only held back from marrying you on account of the curse."

"I thought so too, Heaven help me!"

"But it looks as if she had been attached to this other fellow all the time, and her fancy for you was only a transient hallucination that vanished as soon as he reappeared. It is a great shame, Mr. Vandeleur, but these things constantly occur."

"I know," said Vane, bitterly, 'A substitute shines brightly as a king, until the king is by.' I was but a substitute, that helped to amuse her and pass away the dull 'days of absence,' while her midshipman lover was away."

"Well, never mind! 'There's as good fish in the sea as ever was caught out of it,'—and many a woman in the world better than Berenice Brooke! When I come to reflect upon it all, however, I may blame her, I cannot wonder much. Why Lord, sir, they had loved each other from their very babyhood up. Another Paul and Virginia, sir. When he went to sea, three years ago, she took it so to heart that she had a fit of illness—she had, indeed."

"Oh, do not dwell upon these distracting topics. I do not blame her return to her earliest love; I only bewail that brief 'hallucination' in which I believed, and which has broken my heart and blighted my life," groaned the unhappy lover.

"Well, now, what am I to say? Really now, you know you take me up so often that I can't get on at all," very justly complained the captain.

"Oh, excuse the irritability of a very unhappy man," sighed Vane.

"I do, of course, I do."

"And—go on."

"Yes; but go on—how? You must tell me now what

you want me to say, and what not to say. I would like to please you if I could."

"Tell me facts of their marriage, but do not speak of their mutual love—I cannot bear it."

"All right—I'll mind my eye but it's tight steering with you for a pilot. Now then, I told you, I think, that the marriage was a strictly private one?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, I'm not good at a narrative, and that's a fact. I can steer a ship better than I can tell a story. But I better tell it, I reckon, from my own point of view?"

"Any way, any way."

"Well then, to begin at the beginning:. After you were gone, she took on a dreadful deal, and Madam Journey and the others did all they could to console her —in vain. They brought all the young people together at Henniker, and had parties almost every day."

"Oh, yes her long letters told me all that, and how I was 'not forgotten amid the lighted hall—amid the pealing music, and joyous festival,' " said Vane, with a bitter, mocking laugh.

"Well, but her letters didn't tell you, did they, that young Basil Wall was the most successful of all who tried to console for your absence?"

"No, indeed."

"Yet such was the fact—for I was an eye-witness to that same myself. You must know that I spent some weeks at Henniker, before I came on this voyage?"

"You did?"

"Yes, for several reasons. First, I sent Halcyone for a long visit to Fulvia and Flavia Wall. Then, my precious housekeeper took it into her contrary head that it was improper for her to continue to live under the same roof with me, without the presence of another lady to protect her—just as if *I* were a dangerous man to an old girl like her!"

Even Vane, in all his misery, broke down into a laugh at this idea.

"Well," continued the ill-used old man, "my Pinky is a hornet in temper, but she is the best housekeeper in

the world, always excepting the Widows of Widowville. And when she went away, I missed her, I tell you! I couldn't get anything fit to eat at home. About that time the thaw came, and the river opened, and I began to think about getting the Carrier righted and repaired. So I went over to Henniker to see about it. Of course you remember that the Carrier was capsized right on the shore, at the foot of Madam Journey's old field, and stuck fast there in the ice all winter?"

"Certainly."

"And that it was a long way from my house, and a very little way from hers?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, now I am coming to the point. When I went over to Henniker, to see about my ship, Madam Journey says to me:

" 'Captain, while you are getting the wreckers to right and repair your vessel, you had better take up your abode with us. We should be very happy to have you here.' Oh, she is an angel, is Madam Journey!" said the old man, gratefully.

"She is a very kind old lady," agreed Vane.

"She is. And, you bet, I jumped at her offer! For half a dozen reasons, I accepted it on the spot! In the first place, it was a deliverance from the martyrdom of bad meals at home! In the second place, it was a convenience to be near my vessel. In the third place, it was beatitude to be near my darling Widows!"

"I am glad you had the grace to add that," said Vane, smiling.

"I am not going to bore you," continued the captain, "with an account of the trouble I had with the Carrier, before we succeeded in getting her righted and repaired. Twenty times I thought we'd have to give her up for a bad job. At length, however, we got her into ship-shape and sailing order. And then I made a trial-trip with her down the creek as far as Henniker Point. There I lay a little while to get my old scattered crew together again."

"That took you some time and trouble, I should think?"

"It did, sir but at length that job also was done. So I had nothing to do but to get my traps on board; and my orders from the country traders for the spring goods. Having done all that, I went around and took leave of all my friends. I left Halcyone with Fulvia and Flavia, to help cheer up poor old man Wall, who was failing very fast—so fast that, his death being expected, young Basil Wall——"

"Perdition take him!" groaned out Vane, between his teeth.

"Yes, of course and so it will," assented the old man. "But I was about to say young Basil got an extension of leave, to stay and see the last of his aged relative. So when I bade my old friend good-bye, I felt that it was for the last time. Well, that was on a Monday evening. I was to sail on Tuesday morning with the first tide. So, Tuesday, I was on the deck of my vessel, seeing to the stowing away of the last goods that had come on board, when here comes Major Hourie, at the very last minute, to give me a commission to buy certain goods for him in New York. After he had done that, he turns to me and asks:

"'Have you heard the news?'

"'What news is that?' says I.

"'The news that is setting all the village a-fire,' he answers, with a smile.

"'I have seen no conflagration,' says I.

"'No—but haven't you heard of that strange marriage?' he asks.

"'What marriage?'

"'Why, the marriage of Midshipman Basil Wall to Miss Berenice Brooke, to be sure.'

"Well, Mr. Vandeleur, if I did not jump a yard from my deck and come down again with a shock that jarred me, from the soles of my feet to the crown of my head! I said it was not, and could not be, true. He answered, that it certainly was; that the whole village was ringing

with the news; and that it came from Father Bonhomme himself, who performed the ceremony"

"Oh, be brief, be brief, my friend! How and why was it?"

"Well, from what Major Hourie told me, the old gentleman had set his head on the marriage of his nephew with this young lady. They had been friends from childhood, and loved each other dearly. Now feeling that his days were numbered, he had determined to have them married immediately. So he sent for the license and the priest and the lady, and then Midshipman Basil Wall and Miss Berenice Brooke were united in holy matrimony by the bedside of the dying man, in the presence of Madam Jernyngham and others, Father Bonhomme performing the ceremony, and old Basil himself giving away the bride."

Vane Vandeleur covered his face with his hands, so that nothing but the great heaving of his bosom betrayed the storm of agony that shook his whole soul.

"That is all I know about the matter; for I was all ready to make sail, and had to send the major, with all the rest of the landsmen, on shore. I sailed immediately, and got here in good time. I did not see the marriage notice at all."

While Captain Storms spoke, the cabin was entered by two visitors, Father Francis Carroll, and Vane's servant.

"Oh! how do you do? How do you do? You are improved by your voyage. You look like another man!" exclaimed the captain, cordially greeting the priest.

Father Francis returned the salutation, and then explained.

"Coming from the ferry I saw your flag, and brig, and came on board, and—bless me, there is Vandeleur!" he broke off, and exclaimed, on recognizing his fellow voyager.

Vane lifted his head an instant, to say that he had missed the train, and was returning to the ferry, when the sight of the Carrier brought him on board.

Then Father Francis informed his late companion that he, and William, the servant, had got all the luggage

through the ordeal of examination, and that it was safely stowed at the "Marine," where he had also taken lodgings for himself, and for the invalid, John Brooks.

"I feel it my duty to stay with that poor man until he is able to travel, and then to see him safe home," said the priest.

His resolution was much approved by the others.

"I shall return to Maryland with Captain Storms, and wait there the return of the 'happy pair' from their bridal tour!" said Vane, bitterly.

Father Francis gave some sage advice, and hastened to take leave, promising to send Vane's luggage to the vessel immediately.

In due course, the luggage arrived, and was stowed away.

That same day, the Carrier, with Vane Vandeleur on board, sailed for the Chesapeake.

But, even with all this testimony before us, does my reader believe that Berenice Brooke had forfeited her faith and married young Basil Wall?

CHAPTER XII.

FOND AND FAITHFUL.

With all the evidence to the contrary, notwithstanding, you *do* believe that Berenice Brooke was true to her lover, and you are right.

Old Captain Storms had run off with a wrong version of that marriage story, as Vane had drawn a wrong inference from the marriage notice. Both believed her to be false. Her lover at least should have known her better than the old sailor did, better even than we do, who are only outsiders, and yet who know her to be true.

But then in this instance, as in many others, of passioned excitement, the spectators are more able than the actors to judge rightly.

Berenice Brooke was true as truth, as the following pages will prove.

But we must go back to the point of time when we left our friends at Henniker, and went to meet Vane Vandeleur at Havre.

We left Berenice Brooke anxiously expecting the return of her lover and her friends, for her sake, fearfully looking forward to the same event.

We left Halcyone McAlpine and her confederate, Fulvia Wall, plotting against the peace of poor Clarence Fairlie, and Miss Pinky Skinner manœuvring to marry her master.

The interest of our true story concentrates now at the unpretending country-place known as the Forest Farm.

There were present in the farm-house the venerable head of the family, old Mr. Basil Wall, his two nieces, Fulvia and Flavia, his nephew, Young Basil, his three guests, Halcyone McAlpine, Pike Turner, and Pinky Skinner, and his two old servants.

About the first of the trying month of March, old Basil Wall, the venerable patriarch of an hundred seasons, began to fail—to fail fast, yet gently, as the fading of a fair winter's day. He felt no pain or grief of mind or body. As he had healthily lived out his term of life, so now he was easily dying—not a pathological death as most people die, mind you, but a physiological death, being a gentle decadence of all the bodily life.

Death came to him as a soothing sedative, composing him to rest; or as a loving mother, hushing him to sleep.

His loving and beloved girls did not suspect, as even he himself did not at first know his real condition. They saw and he felt that he was a little feebler than before; but this weakness brought with it such a perfect freedom from care and pain, such a sweet, soft languor of mind and body, such a lightness and brightness of spirit, that he could not recognize it as the approach of the great change.

His nieces at first only thought that he was more given up to reverie than heretofore. During the day, he sat longer in his easy chair than he had been accustomed to.

And he even read, wrote and talked much less than usual. He ate and drank less, also. Towards the decline of day, he would sink into deeper silence and stillness. And through all the evening, he would sit reclining as if absorbed in meditation. Sometimes the young people would forget his presence, and make a good deal of noise around him, until the thoughtful and affectionate Fulvia would raise her finger in warning, then inquire:

"Uncle, darling, do we disturb you?"

She would perhaps have to ask this question thrice before he would hear it, and waking up as if out of a pleasing reverie, would answer, with a gay smile:

"Oh no, not at all, my love. Go on with your play, do, I like to hear you at it."

And so he did. It was not in mere good nature, though, he was very good, but in real truth that he declared he liked to hear them at their play. Buried in his benigne repose, with all his senses introverted, rarefied, spiritualized, by the dawning of the new life in him, all earthly sounds and sights seemed transcendentalized—so that even the noisy talking and laughing of the girls and boys about him sounded clear and melodious as the falling of distant waters and the ringing of silver bells.

Only sometimes he would continue to sit in the same sweet trance, forgetting to call his family to evening prayers until long after their usual hour of retiring, so that the young people would keep up their games until midnight.

It was Pinky Skinner that finally put an end to this unwholesome habit.

"Don't you think," she whispered to Fulvia, one evening, "that we ought to tell Mr. Wall that it is after ten o'clock?"

"Oh, no, Miss Pinky. It would seem like interfering with him, or dictating to him, and we are very careful not to do that; he knows that it is after ten; he can hear the clock strike as well as we can, but he likes to sit there, just as he is; and he is the honored head of the house, and no one must hint to him that anything he chooses to do is not altogether right," replied the loyal Fulvia.

But we all know Miss Pinky Skinner's pertinacity; she was not to be put off her point.

"He *don't* know when ten o'clock comes," she persisted, with a short, emphatic bob of her head. "No, nor when eleven comes, nor when twelve comes. Whenever he rouses himself up, and calls for prayers, then he always thinks it's ten o'clock, as usual. He don't know rightly anything that is going on around him of an evening now. Your uncle is getting to be an old man," added Pinky, putting the case quite delicately, for her.

"Oh, Miss Skinner, what do you mean?" cried Fulvia, clasping her hands, as the arrow of painful conviction sped through her gentle bosom.

"Why you know yourself he is getting old, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, of course, I know he is old. But then he has been old ever since I knew him, and that has been ever since I was born, I think. And he don't seem a day older than he was then."

"That's because you are so used to him you can't see the change; but everybody knows that he is twenty years nearer his grave than he was then."

"Oh, Miss Pinky!"

"Well, don't be scared. He may live longer yet, if he is well taken care of; but he mustn't be let to forget himself and sit up late at night, because it tires him and wears him out."

And with that Miss Pinky "took the responsibility" of arousing him upon herself.

She went up to where the placid old man was peacefully dreaming, and touching him on the shoulder, said:

"Mr. Wall, do you know it is nearly eleven o'clock?"

"Eh, my dear?"

"Do you know it is nearly eleven?"

"Oh! is it you, Miss Pinky? What did you say?"

"It is nearly eleven and time to go to bed," repeated Miss Pinky, with wonderful patience, but then she had much patience with the old and infirm.

"Eh! bless my soul! so late as that? Why didn't they tell me before? I thank you very much, Miss Pinky, for

letting me know. We will have prayers directly," said the old man, now thoroughly roused.

Young Basil ran to bring the candle-stand and set it before the patriarch. And Pinky Skinner turned to Fulvia with a look that seemed to say:

"I told you so."

But Fulvia burst into tears and turned away.

And Flavia had to do her weeping sister's duty and bring the Bible, the lamp and the spectacles, and put them on the stand for the use of the old man.

Fortunately he was too much absorbed in preparing for the evening's devotion to notice the change of handmaids.

But from that evening every one's eyes were opened to his condition, and all became more watchful and attentive to his wants.

Fulvia always told him when ten o'clock came, upon which he would rouse himself and conduct the evening de-devotions with his usual earnestness and fervor.

Pike Turner was always ready to give him the aid of his own strong arm in going up to his chamber; and this aid the old man came to need more and more as day followed day.

Pinky Skinner, noticing his failing appetite, daily went into the kitchen herself and prepared delicious little dishes to surprise and tempt the invalid to eat.

Halcyone would leave all her sports to sing for him through the long mornings.

Young Basil Wall sat and read to him by the hour.

At length, the time came when it required the united strength of the stalwart hunter and the athletic young midshipman to help the old man down stairs in the morning and up stairs at night, and when things came to this pass, old Basil smiled benignly and said:

"When it takes *two* to carry me up and down, I think I should rather stay in my chamber than give so much trouble."

"But it is no trouble," both his bearers hastened in a breath to assure him. "No trouble at all; and so long as it does not fatigue *you*, to be brought down, we would

rather bring you. Think how lonesome it would be for us all to miss you out of the sitting room."

"Think how the girls would take it to heart," said young Basil.

"And how we *all* should," added Pike.

And they spoke not in flattery, but in truth; and old Basil Wall believed them, and for all their sakes he allowed himself to be dressed and taken down stairs as long as he was able. But the time soon came when this daily removal was no longer safe for the feeble old man. And again Miss Pinky Skinner, who, with all her faults, had more practical good sense than any one else in the house, intervened to prevent an accident.

There are some people who can do the unkindest things in the kindest manner. There are others who can do the kindest things in the most unkind manner.

Miss Pinky Skinner belonged to this latter class. She intervened to save old Basil Wall from injury; but she did it most ungraciously. It happened in this way:

One morning, as usual after having taken his breakfast in bed, as he was now in the habit of doing, the old man was dressed and brought down into the sitting-room by the united assistance of the big hunter and the young midshipman. As soon as he was placed in his chair he sank back and fainted.

Every one was panic-stricken, for they thought he was dead.

But Miss Pinky seized a bottle of brandy that stood upon the side-board, and without waiting to pour it into a glass, just pulled out the cork, and pushing past everybody, forced her way to the fainting man and then, changing instantly to gentleness, placed the neck of the bottle between his lips and very gradually dribbled it, drop by drop, down his throat. Then, when he had imbibed about half a wine-glass full, she took it away and placed at his nose a little vial of spirits of ammonia.

And while she did this, and saw that her patient was reviving, she turned with ill-repressed fierceness upon the frightened group around her, and in a voice that was at once half-suppressed and furious, she flew at them with:

"What do you mean by it? Are you all so impatient for the old man's death that you begrudge him the few days he has on earth, and haul him up and down stairs twice a day for the set purpose of shaking the little life he has left out of him?"

"Oh, Miss Pinky——" began Fulvia, pleadingly clasping her hands.

"Hold your noise! Aint you you ashamed of yourself, after trying to have him shaken to death by them two men, to quarrel over him now to finish him. Don't you see I'm trying my best to bring him to? But what do you care? You don't want him brought to! But I shall do it for all that in spite of you!" answered Pinky, in a fierce whisper, for while she was longing to shake the girls she was also anxious to avoid injuring her patient.

"Oh!" breathed Flavia deprecatingly, but she got no farther. She was cut short with:

"Hold your tongue, Miss! Are *you* helping to murder him too? *All* of you against one poor old man. For shame!"

"My dear Miss Skinner, you are really too hard on them," ventured young Basil, who thus instantly drew the lightning of Pinky's wrath down upon his own head.

"Mr. Midshipman, have the politeness to speak when you are spoken to, and have the decency to go out of the room and *stay* out, too! You and Pike Turner both! You have both of you done the poor old gentleman all the harm you possibly could. Now, may be you'll give him a little chance of his life by leaving him to me!"

Thus fiercely rebuked the two men turned and crept softly away, as much like guilty wretches as two brave and generous natures could possibly look. And all this humiliation they bore rather than disturb the old man by resenting the insolence that had been offered them.

"You can't do any good here. I think you had better go too," said Miss Pinky to the girls, who, having the fullest confidence in her skill as a nurse, immediately obeyed her, by following Pike and young Basil out.

Left alone with her patient, Miss Pinky went very judiciously to work. The invalid chair upon which he lay

was one of those that can be converted at will into an inclined lounge at any angle the invalid may require. She let it down into a nearly horizontal level, placed a cushion under the patient's head, and then arranged his dressing-gown around him comfortably.

While she was still quietly working over him, he quite recovered himself, recognized his attendant, and spoke to her.

"You are very good to me. I thank you much," he said.

"You must keep quiet for a little while, Mr. Wall, and rest yourself until you feel better," she said, spreading a gentleman's large shawl over him, and tucking up his feet.

Nothing suited the old man's state better than repose; he folded his hands and resigned himself to that placid, trance-like reverie in which he now passed so many of his hours.

Pinky sat quietly by him with her knitting in her hand. Hour after hour passed in this way until dinner time drew near, when the door softly opened, and Fulvia, who could no longer bear the suspense, put her head into the room.

Miss Pinky forbore to fly at her, and even beckoned her to approach.

"You may come in now, if you'll behave yourself. He's better; he's doing very well. You sit by him, while I go down in the kitchen and make something that will tempt his appetite at dinner," she said, rising and meeting Fulvia half way across the large room.

Fulvia grasped the nurse's hands gratefully and said sincerely:

"Miss Pinky, indeed I am very sensible of your kindness to uncle. And so are we all, indeed we are."

Miss Skinner slowly swayed up her head in a half-injured manner, as if she had received an apology which she could not accept.

"And I know, and we all know," continued Fulvia, still holding Pinky's hands, "that you never meant what you said about us."

"Yes, I did mean it too," snapped Miss Skinner, snatch-

ing away her hands. "You are all killing the old gentleman, as fast as ever you can, hauling him up and down stairs every night and morning, when he really is not fit to be out of his bed."

Fulvia looked at her with a deprecating and pleading glance.

"It was done for the best, Miss Pinky—done in ignorance. But you are more experienced than we are. And if you will be so good, you shall now take the full control of everything here, and we will all do exactly what you tell us to do," said Fulvia, very meekly, for she would have abdicated any domestic throne and descended to any humiliation for the sake of that beloved uncle.

Nothing could have pleased Miss Skinner better than this delegation of authority into her own hands, but she would not betray the satisfaction she felt; quite the contrary; so she answered with a sniff and a toss:

"Oh! *I* don't want to rule anybody's house myself. If I can do anything for the old gentleman, I'll do it of course."

And then she suddenly jerked herself out of the room.

Fulvia was wise enough to know that this verbal repudiation of the trust really meant the actual acceptance of the responsibility. So with a smile she seated herself beside the placidly reposing old man.

The dining-room was back of this one in which the old gentleman reposed.

Fulvia heard the rattling of dishes and cutlery as Flavia and Halcyone set the table for dinner. And she anxiously wondered whether her uncle, who had never yet been absent from that meal, would be well enough to join them on this occasion, and whether Miss Pinky Skinner would think so.

In due time her doubts were put at rest by the re-appearance of that "medley of contraries."

"Dinner is ready to go on the table now, and we must get him up," she said, coming up to the side of the couch.

"Will he be able to go to the table," whispered Fulvia.

"If *he wa'n't able*, do you think I would talk about getting him up to dinner?" snapped Miss Skinner.

"Oh, no, certainly not," answered poor Fulvia.

"Go and make him believe he ain't able to sit at the table any longer, and you'll kill him off directly. Of course, you can do it, if you like."

"Oh, no, Miss Pinky. You know best. Tell us what to do, and what not to do, and we will obey you, and thank you, too."

"Well, then, trust me or *not* trust me, one or t'other!"

"We will trust you, entirely."

"Then you musn't be catechizing me all the time."

"I won't, Miss Pinky."

"Because, if you do, I just wash my hands of the whole case."

"Indeed, I won't, Miss Pinky."

While she spoke, Miss Skinner was screwing up and gently raising the lounge to restore it to its form of a chair. When it was upright again the old gentleman, who seemed to take everything quietly, as a matter of course, thanked her, and said he felt much better.

"And now, Mr. Wall, dinner is ready. But I think you had better let us wheel your chair into the dining-room, than tire yourself by walking there, when there is no occasion for you to do it," said Miss Pinky.

And, without waiting for his consent, which she never for a moment considered necessary, she placed herself at the back of his chair, and wheeled it into the dining-room, while Fulvia meekly held the door open.

She wheeled him to his own proper place at the table, where she had arranged his own particular dinner—fresh shad-roes, delicately dressed in new, rich cream, a boiled spring chicken, and a wine jelly.

The rest of the family came in and gathered around the table.

Old Mr. Wall asked the blessing, with his usual solemnity; and then offered to each, in succession, a share of his own especial delicacies, which all, as a matter of course, thankfully declined.

Then he himself partook of them with good relish.

After dinner his chair was wheeled back to the large, pleasant front-room.

And he was surrounded by his family, who spent the afternoon in chatting with him.

In the midst of the pleasant chat, Miss Pinky suddenly made a proposition that she had had in her head all day and which met with the instant approval of all who heard it. It was this:

"I think, Mr. Wall," she said, "that as you are so fond of having the young people around you, and this is such a large and cheerful room, it would be a good and wholesome change for you to have your bed brought down here. It would save you the trouble and fatigue of going up and down stairs every morning and evening. And then, you know, we could use the rooms on the other side of the hall for parlors."

"That is a good idea, Miss Pinky, a most excellent idea, and I thank you for it. What do you think, my children, eh?" inquired the old gentleman, glancing around to see how his young people received the proposition; for however well he himself might wish the change, he would not effect it against their inclinations.

"It is a first-rate plan, dear uncle. Miss Pinky thinks of every thing for the best. Oh, indeed, I think Providence surely sent her to us," said Fulvia, quietly.

Ah! if there was ever a most innocent sycophant for the sake of one she loved, it was Fulvia Wall.

"Very well," said the old man, who, like all invalids, or nearly all, was delighted with the prospect of change. "Very well. Then it shall be done. And I wish it were done now."

"It can be done this afternoon if you desire it, Mr. Wall," answered Miss Pinky, who would have worked hard for the old gentleman's gratification.

All the young people went zealously to work, and made the desired change in a very few minutes, without noise or bustle; although indeed, as the old gentleman was not nervous, so that he himself was permitted to sit still, no amount of noise or bustle around would have disturbed him.

It was, as we have said, a large and pleasant room, with two windows on the east and two on the south. The old

man's bed was placed in the northwest angle, with its head to the north, so that when he occupied it, turn where he would he could see out on the open sky and budding trees, for in those laditudes the trees do often begin to bud in March.

After this removal, old Basil Wall was even more comfortable and happy than he had been before. He was as pleased as a child, at the change. His migrations were now no longer up and down stairs, but only from the bed to the easy chair by the window, in the morning, and back again at night. And as long as he was able to do this, he also joined the family at meals, for he dearly loved to be among his young people. He was dying, but he was not diseased, you will observe; therefore he was not irritable; and though all his senses were changing, he loved light, and sound, and movement around him. There never was a cheerfuller place than that chamber in which he passed the last few weeks of his early life. It was the porch of Heaven to him.

He continued to fail steadily. But still neither he nor his family fully realized his condition; he and they seemed passively to take it for granted that he might live for years in his present state.

It was not until he became so weak as to have no longer either the power or the will to rise from his bed that their eyes were opened, and they saw that he was dying—dying not hurriedly and painfully, but slowly and peacefully; not of disease, but of old age; as a man always should, but seldom does.

And yet "dying" is not the right word either. Since there is no such thing as death, there should be no such word as dying.

The venerable patriarch of a hundred seasons was passing away. The feebler his frame became, the brighter his spirit burned within him.

From that fading white face, framed in its flowing white hair and beard, the soul of young manhood shone out again—not earthly, impetuous youth, that would soon run its course, but divine, serene manhood, that would live forever an archangel in Heaven. So beautiful was he in

these days that he became dearer to his young people than ever. And at the idea of losing him, they could not always restrain their tears.

But when he saw them weeping near him, he would smile and say:

"I should be sorry to see you weep, my darlings, could I be sorry for any thing now; but the time of light and peace has come to me and I see all things through a rarefied atmosphere, so that your very tears, my loves, seem bright with good, like summer rain drops glittering in the sun."

In the heavenly sphere of the parting saint, even antagonisms were reconciled, and natural enemies met kindly there, who met not even patiently anywhere else—Pinky Skinner and Pike Turner.

Pike Turner had at first lingered longer than usual at the Forest Farm, for reasons best known to himself and the fair-haired Flavia; and now he continued to stay because his services were really indispensable to old Basil Wall. It was Pike's strong arms that firmly and tenderly lifted him whenever the old man wished to be turned.

"Whatever should I do without you, Pike?" old Basil Wall would sometimes ask, looking gratefully in the face of his friend.

"Whatever should I do without you, sir?" the big hunter would as gratefully respond, for he felt so strong an attachment to the old man and so great a pleasure in serving him, that he knew when the parting should come he should miss him very much.

Pike slept on a pallet outside the room door, so as to be within call if the old man should need his help in the night.

Pinky Skinner, who had first come to the Forest Farm to please herself and to spite old Storms, her master, now stayed for the better motive of nursing the dying man. She had the best bedroom in the house, but when or where she slept it would have been very hard to tell.

Pinky was of a sharp, nervous, mercurial temperament, and did not require much rest. She was a martinet in managing a household, a wide-awake watcher in sickness,

yet withal infinitely tender to the weak and suffering. The dying man was very weak, though not suffering. And Pinky seldom left his room to take a wink of sleep or a morsel of food for herself. She snatched these necessaries of life when and where she could—sometimes taking a cup of coffee, or a plate of soup by his bedside, or dropping into a little doze in the easy chair, when she knew Pike Turner was on the watch near the bed's-head.

No hand so skillful in preparing the most delicate, refreshing and digestible little dishes for the failing appetite; no eye so true in tempering the light to the fading sight; no voice so gentle, yet so distinct, to the fainting sense of hearing; no touch so tender in bathing the pale face, combing the white hair, and smoothing the rumpled pillows; no patience so enduring as Pinky's. She might be a vixen in some situations, but she was a sister of mercy in a sick room—if, indeed, this room in which there was no sickness could be called such. Pinky seemed transformed; but she was only *upset;* and this process, which is understood to be anything but desirable to most persons, had a highly improving effect upon her, for it placed her better nature in the ascendant.

She was gentle not only to the old man, but to everyone else, for his sake—even to Pike Turner, whom she disliked as the imaginary cause of her disappointment in Captain Storms.

But, if no one else in the wide world appreciated Pinky, the dying man did.

Once when she sat by him, smoothing his white hair back from his pale forehead, he lifted his hand and laid it in benediction on her head, and smiling softly on her, said:

"God bless you, poor, lonely woman!—poor, unwedded, childless woman, God bless and comfort you, as your presence has blessed and comforted me!"

If anybody else, under any other circumstances, had dared to pity Miss Pinky Skinner for not being a wife and mother, the chances are that she would have flown at that reckless individual and snapped his head off, then and there. But she had no desire to inflict this severe

and summary punishment upon the dying man, she took the only other alternative left her, and wept a little.

"Never mind, Pinky—never mind, my dear; it may be all the better for you in Heaven—and none of us are very far off from that happy place!"

Old Mr. Wall had been confined to his bed some days before his family thought it necessary to inform their friends of his condition.

In the spring thaw the roads had been rendered so bad as to make the travelling very difficult and dangerous. And so no voluntary visits were made to the Forest Farm, except by Clarence Fairlie, who risked his life thrice a week to come and see—Halcyone? No, indeed, for his cure was progressing finely; but—Fulvia Wall. He would not have acknowledged this fact even to himself, for poor fellow, he was surprised, he was ashamed, he was even incredulous of the possibility of such inconstancy. He had no suspicion of the real state of affairs. How Halcyone had really made a present of him to her friend Fulvia. But so absorbed was the young lover in his own incomprehensible embarrassments, and so ignorant was he of old Mr. Wall's real state, that he never rightly reported it at Hourie Hall, so that Major Hourie knew no more than that this March weather had been very trying to his old friend Basil Wall, who was not so well as usual.

At length, however, as the young man was taking leave one evening, Fulvia said to him:

"Ask Major Hourie to come and see my uncle. Tell him that the old gentleman is very, very low."

This was a revelation to Clary, who not only delivered his message at Hourie Hall, but stopped on his way at Henniker House to tell Mrs. Jernyngham, who was Mr. Wall's dearest friend, and also old Captain Storms, who was then staying at Henniker to superintend the repairs of his vessel.

Captain Storms was the very first to hurry over to the Forest Farm to see the dying patriarch.

He was cordially received by Fulvia and Flavia, and affectionately by Halcyone.

Pike Turner offered to show him into Basil Wall's room.

"Who is taking care of him?" inquired the captain.

"Pinky and myself mostly, though all the family devote themselves to him; but Pinky is the most experienced one to nurse him, and I am the strongest in the back to lift him about," answered the hunter.

"You and Pinky! Thunder and lightning! You don't mean to say that you and she are in cahoot again?" exclaimed the captain, stretching his eyes.

"We are partners in nursing and lifting the old man, that is all," said Pike.

"Has she thrashed you yet?" inquired the captain.

Pike smiled, saying:

"Pinky is as gentle as any lamb in the old man's room."

"Well, she may be gentle as a lamb with him, because he is dying, but she is as fierce as a wild cat with me. Blest if I didn't think she would have flown at me and torn my eyes out the day she left, and blest if I didn't wish she had, rather than gone. I didn't get a decent meal's victuals after she deserted me until I went to Widowville. I firmly believe I should have died of dyspepsia, if it hadn't been for my darling Widows. Long live the Widows of Widowville. May there always be a widow there as long as old Tom Storms lives! But come, let me go to see my old friend."

Pike Turner took him across the hall into the other cheerful front room, where a bright little wood-fire burned on the hearth, where the splendid morning sun shone in through the white curtained windows, where the good old man lay placidly reclining on his white bed, and where Pinky sat patiently watching.

"Hallo! shipmate! Sorry to see you off your pegs! How is it with you, man?" said the captain, boisterously approaching the bed.

This tempestuous advent, that would have shaken the nerves of a sick man, only roused and amused the dying one. It is well with me, old friend," he replied, holding out his hand.

Pinky Skinner got up to give the visitor her chair.

"How do you do, Miss Pinky?" then said the old sailor, greeting her and offering his hand.

"I'm well, I thank you, Captain Storms; how do you do yourself?" she responded, with cold politeness, and without taking the offered hand.

"None the better for wanting you, Miss Pinky, that I assure you," candidly confessed the captain.

Miss Pinky tossed her head and withdrew from the room.

Old Basil Wall's eyes followed her vanishing form with affectionate regard.

"She is so good to me," said old Basil Wall.

"Glad to hear it; but she was bad enough to me," growled Captain Storms.

"She was sent to me by Divine Providence, I do believe."

"She was sent to me by His Satanic Majesty, I think."

"I am surprised to hear you say so. I find her the most skillful and tender nurse and the best comforter a poor old man like me can have about him."

"*I* found her the worst vixen and worst torment I ever knew."

"Why, didn't she do her faithful duty by you, my old friend? I always thought she did."

"Umph, umph, umph, I don't know about that."

"Didn't she keep your house well?"

"Yes; but she has such a devil of a temper."

"I haven't found it out. Didn't she take good care of you?"

"Yes; but she has such a devil of a temper."

"Didn't she give you the best cooked meals in the country?"

"Yes; but she has such a devil of a temper."

"Didn't she keep your clothes in order?"

"Yes, but her temper."

"Nurse you when you were sick?"

"Yes, but her temper."

"Wait on you even when you were well?"

"Yes, but her temper."

"You must have crossed it in some manner—crossed it cruelly, Captain Storms."

"Well, I suppose I did. I suppose I have committed the unpardonable sin, as far as she is concerned."

Old Basil Wall looked interested and curious.

"How did you offend her?" he inquired, with the low tone that his weakness now made habitual to him.

"She wanted me to marry her, and I just wouldn't do it. I'd have seen her at the deuce first."

"Why—would she really have married you?" inquired the old gentleman, in a tone that was more ingenuous than flattering.

Captain Storms recoiled and drew himself up with an offended air:

"Humph! umph! umph! And why shouldn't she, I wonder?"

"Oh, no reason in the world, if she liked you. But are you not mistaken? A woman like her, shy, prim, prudish to a degree, would never have betrayed a liking for any man, even if she had felt it, which is very doubtful."

"But I tell you she did. She fell in love with me."

Old Basil Wall looked at the great, fat, and burned, weather-beaten, gray and grizzled sailor, and laughed softly at the ludicrousness of the idea. He couldn't help laughing, even on his death-bed. The old sea-captain, who was altogether "of the earth, earthy," had brought more of world into the passing soul's heavenly sphere than had come into it for many days.

"If this is so, my friend, why then didn't you marry her and make her happy, poor woman, and secure for yourself the greatest earthly comfort for your declining years? Pinky is twenty-five or thirty years younger than you. And she would take tender care of you in your old age. See how good she is to me, who am nothing to her but a poor helpless human brother."

"Humph, umph, umph! That may be all very true, but a man don't like to be married by main force."

"Remember how faithful she has been to you, for all these years. Refusing all offers of marriage—for she was a pretty girl in her youth and had many offers, as you

know—refusing all for the sake of staying with you and keeping your house."

"All very true; but a man don't want to be married against his will, for all that."

"And how well she has done for you, in sickness and in health! What a skillful housekeeper, what a tender nurse she has been."

"True, but a man doesn't like to be married, whether or no."

"Could the most faithful wife have been more faithful to you than Pinky has been?"

"Look here, Mr. Wall! Has Miss Skinner employed you as her advocate to plead her cause with me? And has she left the room and left you alone with me for that purpose?"

"It looks like it," candidly admitted old Basil Wall—"but—I am a dying man and I would not deceive you—and so I assure you by all my hopes of Heaven, the poor woman has never even mentioned your name to me—never."

He spoke now so faintly that even the obtuse old sailor saw that he had talked too much. Old Basil could bear a great deal of light, and life, and sound, and movement all around him, and even enjoy it and derive benefit from it, so that he himself was not required to talk or move much, for though he was not ill or irritable, he was very, very weak.

Captain Storms arose to take leave.

"Old friend, you are going to sea again in a few days?" said Mr. Wall.

"Yes," gruffly replied the captain.

"And this may be the last time we may meet on earth."

"I hope not—I hope not," more gruffly still replied the captain, for emotion was beginning to choke his voice.

"In any case, will you promise me at least to think seriously of what I have said to you about poor, dear Pinky?"

"Yes, I will—I will, indeed—I will," said the sailor huskily.

And then with a mutual "God bless you!" the old friends parted, never to meet again in this world.

Old Basil Wall's next visitor was Mrs. Jernyngham. It was several days after the call of Captain Storms that the mistress of Henniker House ventured to encounter the dangers of the road, to come to see her oldest friend. She came so early in the morning that she reached the Forest Farm about ten o'clock.

She was warmly welcomed by all the family, and shown at once into the chamber of the passing man. Even Mrs. Jernynham, accustomed as she was to dainty neatness, was struck with surprise and pleasure at the perfect cleanliness, brightness, and cheerfulness of the old man's chamber, and of all around and about it.

Again Pinky Skinner, after shaking hands with the lady, vacated her place by the bedside, in favor of the visitor, and left the room.

Mrs. Jernyngham greeted her old friend with a pleasant smile, repressing all the emotion she felt at seeing him lying thus upon his death-bed.

He inquired kindly after all her family, and was told that they were all well and sent their love to him.

Then very particularly he inquired about Berenice Brooke and her absent lover.

At the starting of this subject, Mrs. Jernyngham began to cry. She did not wish to agitate her feeble friend, but she could not help it—any mention of that matter was sure to make her weep.

"Don't cry—tell me what the trouble is," said old Basil, kindly.

"Oh, it is nothing new. You know what it is. Only now we expect him back soon. His absence hasn't cured him or her. It has made them both ten times worse. You know, good Bishop Waldemar and myself planned Vandeleur's voyage, feeling certain in our own minds that one of two things would happen—that either they would be weaned from each other and so would part forever; or else if their love was really too strong to be affected by separation, that it would be strong enough to conquer

superstition, and so they would marry like other true lovers."

"Well?" inquired old Basil, with interest.

"Well, neither of these things has happened. Absence hasn't conquered their love nor her superstition. He is coming back to live here forever, so as to be always near her. She is as firmly resolved as ever not to marry him. They are more madly in love with each other than ever. And she dreams a wild dream of their living pledged to each other in a sort of pure, platonic friendship all their lives. Oh, you know this is impossible. How it will end, Heaven only knows. In madness or death, or sin and shame, I do fear," said the old lady, bitterly wringing her hands.

"Hush, hush, do not say such dreadful things We must prevent all that," said the old man, soothingly.

"We cannot prevent it. We might, by persuasion, or argument, or even by force separate our child from her lover; but to do that would be to doom her to certain death. She is what a certain gifted woman said of herself—'a soul of fire in a body of gossamer.' She would burn out very soon. She cannot live without him, and she will not marry him. Oh, what is to be done?" said the old lady, weeping.

"I will tell you. I can do some good yet before I die. Berenice shall marry her lover, and 'live happy ever afterwards,' according to the end of all true love stories," said the old man, calmly.

Mrs. Jernyngham looked in his face to see whether or not his mind was wandering. Basil Wall smiled brightly, as he observed her doubts, and replied to them:

"No, I am not delirious. Never in my life has my mind been so bright and clear and calm as, thank Heaven, it is now. And it required a clear head, I assure you, my dear lady, to see my way through this difficulty of your young lovers as I do see it."

"I should think so. But how can you see a way, where way there is none?" sighed Mrs. Jernyngham.

"Listen, dear friend," said the old man, with a smile so holy and benignant, that it seemed to draw the sphere of

Heaven around them, "listen. Since I have been lying here on this bed, with the dawn of the new life brightening and blessing all within and around me, so divinely happy in myself, I have felt the tenderest love and pity for all that I must leave behind me, on this earth, and I have wished to do all I can before I go to make them all happy —even, my poor, dear little Pinky. How much then have I wished to benefit Berenice, the youngest descendant of that line that I have known and loved for five long generations. And lying here with my brain so clear, I have thought out a plan to make Berenice happy with the husband of her choice——"

"In spite of her superstition?" sighed Madam Jernyngham, incredulously.

"No, but through her superstition."

"Through her superstition? Then you will have to fulfil all the conditions of that oracle."

"Consider them all fulfilled," said Basil Wall, in the most assured manner.

"What?—'The morn shall be midnight?'"

"Consider it already done."

"And the 'eve shall be morn?'"

"It is done."

"'And the child shall be christened before she is born?'"

"Done."

"'And the maid shall be widowed before she is wed?'"

"Yes, my dear friend; and then, according to the oracle, 'the sin will be pardoned, the curse will be dead.'"

"I don't understand you, but I do know that all this is simply impossible."

"So thought Macbeth, when told by the witches that he should never be defeated until Birnam Wood should march to Dunsinane, and never be slain by man of woman born. 'Impossible,' thought the tyrant, and rested in fancied security. Yet Birnam Wood *did* march to Dunsinane, and the usurper was slain by a man not woman born. The witches had kept 'the word of promise to the ear,' but broken it 'to the hope.' Now I will make this

oracle, while it keeps the word of promise to the ear, break it to the *fears*. You shall see."

Mrs. Jernyngham looked at him with curiosity and interest and encouragement.

"How can you possibly do that?" she inquired.

"Very easily, indeed, but I must have your co-operation. Shall I have it? Can you trust me so far as to promise that?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, my friend. Yes, indeed I can and will—fully, thankfully," said the old lady, fervently.

"Attend to me, then."

Mrs. Jernyngham bent her head to his, and the two old people talked together in whispers for a few moments At first there seemed some serious scruple or hesitation on the part of Mrs. Jernyngham; but, at length, these were overcome by the arguments and persuasions of Mr. Wall and then the interview was concluded by their perfect agreement.

"And now," said the old gentleman, "as there is no time to be lost, this business must be done to-day. What is the hour, my good lady?"

"Half-past ten," answered Mrs. Jernyngham, consulting her watch.

"Then I must immediately dispatch three messengers, each to a different place. Be good enough to touch the bell, dear friend."

Mrs. Jernyngham rang the bell, which was answered immediately by the watchful Pinky.

"Miss Pinky, dear, will you send my nephew, and young Fairlie, and my friend, Pike, here? And, in the meantime, give me a pencil and some paper, and a book to write on."

Pinky complied with all his requests. But, as she had some trouble to find the young men, Mr. Wall had three notes written before either of them entered the room.

Pike Turner was the first to come.

"Pike, my good fellow, I want you to mount your horse, and take this note to Leonardtown, and give it to the recorder's clerk there, and bring me back what he gives you. And go, and come as fast as you can."

"Yes, sir, I will go at once," willingly assented the hunter, without ever stopping to ask a question. He had a notion, he afterwards confessed, that the errand related in some way to Mr. Wall's will.

He had scarcely left the room, when young Midshipman Wall entered.

"Basil, my boy! I want you to harness the horses to the carryall and go to St. Rosalie's, and give this note to Father Ignatius or to Father Bonhomme, whichever you may find at the station, and be sure to bring one of them back."

"Certainly, sir, I will hurry off at once," exclaimed the young midshipman, who thought that the dying man might be ardently desiring some religious comfort from the priests.

"Now, then, where is Clary Fairlie?" inquired Mr. Wall, looking round.

"I'm very sorry, but he has not come yet," said Miss Pinky.

"Then what shall I do? I *must* have a messenger to send to Henniker House, immediately," said the old gentleman, in perplexity.

"Let *me* go, Mr. Wall. Oh, do please let me go on your errand. I can outride Clary, or any of the boys, any day. And my pony, Pacha, is quite fresh, and I will do your errand in a couple of hours," eagerly exclaimed Halcyone McAlpine, who had entered the room with the others, and now stood by the old man's side, anxious to be of service to him.

"A thousand thanks, my darling girl, for you are the very best messenger I could have for this business; infinitely better than Clary, or any other 'boy' of them all. I want you to ride to Henniker House, and give this note to Berenice Brooke; it is to entreat her to come to see me at once."

"I'll fetch her, if I have to carry her off by force!" exclaimed Halcyone.

"That will scarcely be necessary, I hope. She will not refuse my request. Now, my dear child, you have a long, hard ride before you; but you will do your errand faith-

fully, I am sure, when I tell you that upon its prompt accomplishment depends the happiness of Berenice Brooke's whole life! There, do not pause to wonder or inquire, but go at once, and take my blessing with you."

Thus adjured, Halcyone hastened out of the room.

In five minutes she had donned her riding-habit, hat and gloves; and in five more she was galloping through the forest toward Henniker House.

CHAPTER XIII.

FULFILLING HER DESTINY.

HALCYONE reached Henniker House flushed, heated, breathless.

Without waiting for the attendance of a groom, she sprang from her horse, tied him to the nearest tree, and ran up the terrace steps.

On the upper terrace, she found Mrs. Brooke, directing the gardener where to set out some bulbous roots for early spring flowers.

The lady looked up in some surprise, at the sudden advent of her excited visitor.

"Why, Halcyone——" she began, putting down her basket of bulbs, and holding out her hand.

"Yes, it is I, Mrs. Brooke; and I am glad to have seen you first; because Madam Journey told me to tell you that you must let her come immediately whether or no," exclaimed the girl, panting.

"Let who come?—and where? Why, how flurried you are, my child! Take time to compose yourself," said Mrs. Brooke.

"Oh! but I haven't got time! I haven't, indeed. I was told to hurry for life and death, because her whole future happiness depended on it," panted Halcyone.

"Whose whole future happiness? How distractingly you talk, child! Come in the house and sit down and tell

me what is the matter," said the lady, leading the way to the front door.

"It's about Berenice and Mr. Basil Wall!" exclaimed Halcyone, dropping breathlessly into a chair, as soon as they had reached the drawing-room, where they found themselves alone.

"Berenice and Mr. Basil Wall, Halcyone! What do you mean, my dear?"

"What I say! Here is the note he sent her. It is open, and of course you can read it, being her mother. He is very near death, and he wants to see her before he dies, and he has written for her to come to him, without loss of time—and I have ridden myself nearly to death to bring the note—and Madam Journey says you must be sure to send her immediately, whether or no," panted Halcyone, holding her hand to her side.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Brooke was reading the little note of three or four lines.

"DEAREST BERENICE:—If your dear mother will permit you, as I am sure she will, pray return immediately with my messenger. I am passing away very swiftly, and wish to see you, and bless you, before I depart.

"BASIL WALL."

"Certainly, Berry must go at once. I will have the carriage ordered directly," said kind-hearted Rosamond Brooke, with tears in her eyes.

"Not the carriage, dear Mrs. Brooke, if you please. It will take too long to go. Have her fast horse saddled. She is a good rider, and we shall get there in half the time it would take the carriage to go," hastily exclaimed Halcyone.

"Yes, yes, that will be better. I will give orders directly. And you run up stairs and give the note to Berenice, and tell her to make haste and put on her habit, and I will have the horse ready at the door by the time she comes down," said the lady, hurrying out of the room.

Halcyone ran up stairs, as she was told, and burst into Berry's bedroom, where she found that young lady in deep

consultation with the village dressmaker, about a spring outfit.

"Halcyone!" exclaimed Berenice, dropping a handsome organdy, which she held in her hand.

"Yes, it is I! I came to startle everybody, I believe. There, don't stop to hug and kiss me. There's no time for that, now! Read that note, and then listen to me!" exclaimed Halcyone, thrusting the paper in Miss Brooke's hand.

Berenice read the note, and looked quickly up to the bearer, exclaiming:

"Of course I will go, directly."

"Then put on your riding-habit, quicker than ever you did anything in your life before. Mrs. Brooke says she will have the horse at the door by the time you get down stairs," said Halcyone.

Even before she ceased to speak, Berenice, assisted by the dressmaker, was busily preparing for the ride.

"Where is Mrs. Dering, and how is she? I haven't seen her since I came in," said Halcyone, politely.

"Grandma' has gone to the village to buy a few things that Miss Jones here wants for our work. She'll be sorry not to have seen you," answered Berenice, nervously buttoning up her habit.

"Well, perhaps Miss Jones will be good enough to give her my respects when she returns," said Halcyone to the dressmaker.

"Certainly," replied the latter.

"And now I am quite ready. Come, Halcyone," said Berenice, settling her riding hat, and drawing on her gloves.

The two girls went down stairs, where they found Mrs. Brooke waiting in the front passage, to see them off. The two horses were at the door, and Euripides was there ready to escort them.

"Good-bye, Halcyone!—Heaven bless you, my dear Berenice! Tell the old gentleman that, if we both live till to-morrow, I will pay him a visit. I would go this very day only we must not all leave the house at the same time.

And be sure to give him my dear, dear love. Do you hear, Berry?" said the lady, as she kissed her daughter.

"Yes, mamma, and I will remember to give your message faithfully," she answered, returning her mother's caress.

You Rip helped the young ladies to mount. And when he had placed them firmly in their saddles, he climbed into his own. And the little cavalcade started.

"Look sharp, You Rip, or we will leave you miles behind," exclaimed Halcyone, touching her horse's flank with her whip, and bounding off in a gallop.

Berenice flew after her and rode with her, neck and neck, and at break-down speed.

Old Euripides followed as fast as he could, bobbing up and down, and shaken fearfully in his saddle, and exclaiming, or rather having the words knocked out of him:

"If there's anything in this world I mislikes more'n anything else, it is to have to wait on young gals when they're out a-riding, 'specially Miss Halcyone, who always goes it as if it was to win a race."

At this rate of speed, the two young girls soon reached the Forest Farm.

By the time they had dismounted, without assistance, You Rip came tearing up, out of breath, after them.

They left their horses to his care, and went into the house, where they were cordially welcome by Fulvia and Flavia.

"I am the first to return! I knew I should be! I told Mr. Wall that I could do his errand quicker than any boy of them all, and so I could! The other messengers have not got back yet!" said Halcyone, triumphantly looking around as they missed the presence of Pike Turner and young Basil.

"No, they have not returned. They may not have been able yet, to find the persons they went in search of," said Fulvia, in explanation.

Berenice looked from one to the other in involuntary curiosity to know who besides herself had been summoned to the bedside of the dying man.

Flavia answered that look according to her own impressions.

"Our dear uncle has sent to Leonardtown, to the recorder's office, something about his will, and he has also sent for one of the priests from St. Rosalie to come and comfort him with some of the sacred offices of the church, I believe. And Mr. Turner and Basil went on those errands for him.

"Our dear uncle finds his strength failing fast, and wishes to settle up all his earthly affairs, and to take leave of all his dear friends, too, I think," added Fulvia.

"Oh," sighed Berenice, full of pity and regret for the good old man.

"Now, then, Berry dear, come up to my chamber and get off your hat and habit, and then I will take you at once into uncle's room. He is down stairs, you know," said Fulvia, leading the way.

At the same time, Halcyone went away with Flavia.

When Berenice had taken off her habit, and arranged her dress, she was shown by Fulvia into old Mr. Basil Wall's apartment.

It looked just as it did when we left it to go with Halcyone to Henniker House. It was not darkened, like a sick room. It was very light, neat and cheerful.

On the bed lay the dying man, with his fine old face, now pale as the white hair that flowed around it. On the right and left of the bed's head, sat Madam Journey and Pinky Skinner.

As Berenice approached, Pinky got up and made way for her.

"Come here, my darling. How do you do?" said the old man, holding out his hand to her, and looking and speaking as if to a little pet child.

"Oh, I am so sorry——" began Berenice, but tears drowned her voice, and she could only weep, and press the pale hand to her lips and bosom.

"Sorry, my dear girl? Sorry that the poor, feeble old man is going to be young, and strong and joyous again, in the new life?

"'Angels weep when a babe is born,
But sing when an old man dies,'

wrote some inspired poet, I forget whom. Don't be sorry, my darling; be glad, for I brought you here to make you happy," said the old man, smiling a benediction on her.

Again she kissed and caressed the wan hand, and then suddenly asked:

"Does it tire you for me to hold it so?"

"No, dear; it refreshes me and does me good. Bless the little, warm young hands that love to hold mine. But now, my darling, we must come to business," he said, gazing kindly on the young girl's pitying face, and then, glancing around to see who else was in the room.

Every one left in the house was there.

"Fulvia, my dear," said the old man, then, "will you kindly take all our friends into the parlor and leave me alone for a few minutes with Mrs. Jernyngham and Miss Brooke?"

"Yes, dear uncle. Send for us again when you want us. Come, Flavia; come, Miss Pinky; let us go into the sitting-room," beckoned Fulvia, leading the way out and followed by the others.

When the door was closed behind them, old Basil Wall turned to Berenice and said:

"Do you know why I sent for you, dear?"

"Yes," answered Berenice, through her tears, "to take leave of me and give me your parting blessing."

"Yes, and to make that blessing felt as a blessing indeed, by providing for your future happiness."

Berenice was puzzled by these words, but she did not perplex herself over them much, for her young heart was so full of pity for the old man that it crowded out every other feeling.

"Berenice, dear, it is about the traditional malediction as it affects your marriage that I wish to talk with you," he said, solemnly.

She turned on him the most loving, appealing, deprecating face, as she pleaded:

"Dear Mr. Wall! do not *you* turn against me now. I could not bear to oppose you now, yet I should have to do

it. Everybody tries to persuade me to disregard that legendary malediction and marry. But I cannot—oh, I cannot. If I were to do so, I should live in the most miserable dread. And if my husband should die, I should think that I had killed him. Oh, forgive me! I know I ought not to speak so forcibly beside your bed. But you see how it is! I cannot do anything to destroy my dear love. I cannot marry Vane Vandeleur!"

"No, my dear, you cannot, or rather you will not marry him until the conditions of that oracle are fulfilled; nor do I blame you for not doing it. You have misunderstood me, my little girl. I did not mean to bid you brave that malediction, but to fulfill your destiny, by fulfilling the conditions of the oracle and destroying the curse; whether it be real, as you fear it to be, or imaginary, as I believe it. We will do that, dear Berenice."

"Oh, how can we do it? The provisions of that prophecy were impossible, and intended to be impossible of fulfillment," wept the girl.

"Are they so? Let us see if they be? What are these provisions? Do you remember them?" smiled the old man.

"Remember them? They are branded on my brain, I think."

"Repeat the mto me. Let me hear them once again, so that we may be better able to judge of the impossibility," said old Basil Wall, with an arch smile, as if he had discovered the way to a happy deliverance which he meant to show.

Madam Jernyngham, who had been a silent looker-on all this while, now turned to Berenice with a wistful gaze, as the girl, in a low, sad, awe-stricken voice repeated the lines which we now quote for the last time

"When the noon shall be midnight,
And Eve shall be morn;
And the child shall be christened
Before it is born.
And the maid shall be widowed
Before she is wed,
The sin shall be pardoned,
The curse shall be dead."

"The conditions shall be fulfilled—fulfilled to the uttermost," said old Basil, solemnly.

"Ah! how can this be done? It is impossible. How can we do it?" exclaimed Berenice in perplexed and painful incredulity.

"Easily," answered Mr. Wall. "Easily enough if you will trust me implicitly.

"Oh, trust him, my dear Berenice! Trust him. He will keep his word. He will enable us to do all that he has said," cried Madam Journey, clasping her aged hands together in the earnestness of her appeal.

"What, grandma'—shall we turn day into night and night into day? Baptize the babe unborn? Widow the maid, unwed?" inquired Berenice, her dark eyes dilated in wonder.

Yes, if he says it, my child."

"But to do all these would be to perform miracles."

"Only trust him," repeated the old lady."

"I do, I do trust him. Show me in what manner I am required to prove my trust," said Berenice, earnestly.

"By promising beforehand to do whatever I shall require you to do here to-day, in the presence of your grandmother, your parish priest, and the members of this family. Berenice, have you faith enough in old Basil Wall to promise him that blind obedience?"

"I have, I have, dear friend, so that you pledge yourself not to make me marry Vane Vandeleur, with the malediction still hanging over our heads," said Berenice solemnly.

"Why, what are you thinking of, child? Have I not already told you that I have no intention of bidding you brave the malediction by marrying your lover? Do I not tell you that I will enable you to overcome the malediction, and in due time marry your lover, if you will do what I require of you? And what I require you to do is to be done here, now and in the presence of those whom you love and honor most on earth! Trust me and do not fear me, my child," said the old man, solemnly.

"Oh, I do—I do; but I feel like one hearing and answering in a dream. Forgive me, and tell me what I am

to do. I pledge myself by all I hold sacred to obey you," she answered fervently.

"That is right, my dear Berenice. Your confidence will not be misplaced," said Mrs. Jernyngham.

"Thank you, my child, for your faith in me. I shall ask you to do nothing but for your own good."

"I am sure of that, dear friend. Command me now," said Berenice.

"First listen, while I explain to you what you have all failed to observe: that the first three conditions of the oracle are already fulfilled," said old Basil Wall, earnestly.

"'The first three conditions of the oracle fulfilled!'" echoed Mrs. Jernyngham and Berenice, simultaneously and in amazement.

"Yes; I proceed to prove that they are," said the patriarch.

"Then, turning to Mrs. Jernyngham, he inquired:

"Do you remember, Madam, that on the day after the marriage of this child's parents, there was a total eclipse of the sun, that took place about noon?"

"Ah! yes, indeed I do, but I had longed ceased to bear it in mind. Well, well, there were so many other things of more interest to think of," replied the old lady, in growing interest and curiosity.

"On that occasion, most certainly, the noon was turned into midnight in its darkness. Nay, indeed, for that matter, I have seen many moonlit or starlit nights much brighter than that day. So 'noon was midnight' then; and thus the first condition of the oracle was fulfilled," said the old gentleman, solemnly.

"I see! I see!" exclaimed Mrs. Jernyngham. "I see it now, but I never thought of it in that relation before."

"Again: Do you recollect when Berenice was born, in the evening there appeared in the heavens the most magnificent and splendid aurora borealis that had ever been seen in these latitudes—that lighted up the whole sky and earth like the dawn of morning?"

"I do, indeed. I recollect it well."

"I have seen many a cloudy day that was darker than

that night. So, then, 'the eve was morn' in its light; and thus the second condition of the oracle was fulfilled."

"It was! it was! tho' it never struck me so before!" exclaimed the old lady, raising her hands in wonder.

"And now, pray listen, yet again: Can you recall the circumstance that, just before the birth of this child, her sorrowing mother said, 'I feel sure my babe will prove to be a daughter, and I will name her Berenice, after that sainted woman who was the first lady of our Maryland line—and so I will bring a blessing on her whole life?' Can you recall this?"

"Oh, I can! I can! I shuddered when I heard the words. For *I* doubted—knowing the old legendary malediction as well as I did—*I* doubted whether that so-called 'sainted woman' were not an accursed demon! And I shuddered, though I did not dare to interfere, for I did not wish to let my daughter know anything about the curse. She had sorrow enough to bear just then, poor thing."

"Well, you recall the circumstance that Berenice received the name she now bears before she came into the world?"

"Yes! yes! though it never occurred to me as having any especial meaning till now," exclaimed the old lady, in increasing excitement.

"So, you see, 'the babe was christened before it was born'; thus the third condition of the oracle was fulfilled."

"It was, oh it was, and I see it all now. And oh, how blind I was, never to have seen it before!" exclaimed Madam Journey, pale and trembling with excessive emotion.

"I did not see it, until I lay here in the light of the dawning life, thinking of Berenice and her fate. Then I saw it, and saw the way to ensure her happiness."

"But though the three almost impossible conditions are fulfilled, there remains the fourth, which seems quite impossible," said Madam Journey, palpitating between her blind faith in Basil Wall, and her fears for Berenice Brooke.

"There remains the fourth condition of the oracle, which must be fulfilled very soon. Berenice, my dear, you

remember your promise to me?" said the old gentleman, turning to the young lady, who had sat during this conference between the two elders, in speechless wonder.

"Yes, dear Mr. Wall," she said, raising his pale hand that she still held, and pressing it to her lips.

"I shall call upon you to redeem it in the presence of all your friends, so that 'the maid shall be widowed before she is wed,' and thus the fourth, and last condition of the oracle shall be fulfilled," said the dying man, looking steadfastly at her.

She returned the look in doubt.

"There is but one way, my darling girl, in which 'the maid shall be widowed before she is wed.' It is when she marries, and very soon after the marriage ceremony, loses her bridegroom. She is fast married, by the legal forms and the Christian rites, and yet she is not really wedded, and thus she becomes a widow while she is still a maid."

Berenice held her very breath in suspense, while the speaker continued:

"You must now redeem the word that you pledged to me, in blind faith, to do whatever I should tell you to do. You must marry me, here, and now, in the presence of your venerable grandmother, and of our family."

"Oh, Mr. Wall!" breathed Berenice, aghast."

"Do not look so frightened, my child. It will be but a form, to take the last remaining sting out of that wicked old malediction. Be my maiden wife to-day, and my maiden widow to-morrow."

"Oh, Mr. Wall! Oh, my dear old friend! It seems sacrilegious to try to secure my happiness through—through—through——" sobbed Berenice, breaking down.

"Through my death, you mean, dear Berenice?"

"Oh, yes, and I can not! I can not! I can not! Oh! indeed I can not!" wept Berenice.

"But my dear, you have no alternative. Your word is passed, and you cannot withdraw it in honor. I anticipated these delicate scruples, dear Berenice, and therefore it was that I took care to bind you by a blind promise, which I now call upon you to keep, my child," said Basil Wall, firmly.

"Oh, grandma', must I? must I?" asked Berenice, turning to the old lady.

"Yes, my dear, you must really keep your promise. And even if you were not bound in honor by that promise, I should still advise you to trust your friend and to abide by his counsel," answered Madam Journey.

"But oh, grandma', to get my deliverance from the malediction only through his death!" sobbed Berenice.

"But it will not be 'death,' my dear child," said the old man, with a heavenly smile—"not death, though we call it so for the want of a truer word. Not death, but a passing away to a higher life. And think, my dear, you could not keep me here a minute longer by refusing my offer, nor could you hurry me away a minute sooner by accepting it. Do you not know that?"

"Oh yes, dear friend, I know it—I know it; but—but——" sobbed Berenice, breaking down again.

"——'But'—by accepting it, you will cause me to pass away much happier for feeling that I have provided for your happiness," said the old man, earnestly contemplating her as she sat with her face buried in her hands, sobbing as if her heart would break—sobbing in sorrow for him who was dying there, and yet thinking of her and her welfare; for the very young cannot see nor believe in that confident anticipation—that intense realization of the approaching new life which is experienced by the aged and dying Christian.

So Berenice wept bitterly, for she loved the old man well, and she saw in him only awful death and holy self-devotion.

"My child, we are losing time. Try to compose yourself and believe me when I tell you that, by accepting my offer—which you are bound in honor to accept—you will give me more joy than other circumstances can give me now, in this world. If you will do so, Berenice, I shall be able to depart in perfect peace."

"Will it be so? Will it, indeed, be so? You are sure?" questioned Berenice, through her tears.

"Quite sure, my good child, quite sure," answered old Basil Wall, solemnly.

"Oh, Berenice, my dear, do not worry him any longer, by opposing his wishes. See how weak he is already. Do as he tells you, pray do," urged Mrs. Jernyngham.

Old Basil Wall's pleading eyes seconded the lady's prayer.

Berenice pressed his pale hand to her heart, covered it with tears and kisses, then bent over him and pressed her warm young lips to his pale, cold brow, as she replied:

"I will—I will do as you wish, dear old friend; and then you must let me stay with you to the last, and watch over you and wait on you as long as you shall be left to us."

"Yes, dear child, I wish you to stay with me while I linger here; the time will not be so long as to tax your patience," he answered, with a benignant smile.

"Oh, but you could never tax my patience, for I should love to serve you," said Berenice.

"And now, dear, we must lose no more time. Will you touch the bell?"

Berenice complied with his request. In a few moments the summons was answered by the entrance of the prompt Pinky, who came in very crossly, saying in a suppressed voice:

"Is he worse? I knew he was seeing too much company; but some people never have any consideration."

This was said for the especial benefit of Mrs. Jernyngham, against whom, as one of the Widows of Widowville, and one of her own rivals in the old sea captain's esteem, Miss Skinner bore a grudge.

"I am not worse, dear Miss Pinky. I am much better. These ladies' visits have done me good."

"Yes, I know how much good they have done you—excited you almost to fever."

"Why, my dear Miss Pinky, I have not had a fever in ten years, I do believe—if I ever had one in my life," smiled the old gentleman.

"Well, I hope you haven't got one now, that's all. But don't disturb yourself, Mr. Wall. You must be quiet. Your chicken soup will be ready in ten minutes, and then you must take it."

"Yes, Miss Pinky; but first, I have a little business to do. Have my messengers returned, do you know?"

"Yes; they are waiting to report to you. And Father Bonhomme is also waiting to see you."

"Then tell my messengers to wait a little longer; and do you, if you please, show Father Bonhomme in here.

Miss Pinky went out to do her errand, and Mr. Wall turned to Mrs. Jernyngham and Berenice, and said:

"My dear friends, I ask you to remain here to shake hands with Father Bonhomme, and then I must request that you will both retire for a short space, and leave me alone with the priest. I have my confession and also some explanations to make, preparatory to that other impending ceremony."

Both ladies bowed their assent just as burly Father Bonhomme bustled into the room.

The jolly priest bowed and shook hands with Mrs. Jernyngham and Berenice, and then turned to the dying man to express his sympathy and regrets.

At that instant the two ladies arose, made their excuses and left the room.

Very few faults had the venerable old patriarch to confess. That ceremony was soon performed, and the absolution pronounced, and the benediction given. Then Mr. Wall entered into a short explanation of his motives in marrying Berenice Brooke on his death-bed. Father Bonhomme, who had recently heard all about the legendary malediction, readily understood his reasons, and agreed to perform the ceremony.

Next, young Basil was called into the room. He came, and brought with him the paper in a sealed envelope, which he had taken from the Register's Office at Leonardtown, and which he now placed in the hands of his uncle.

It was the marriage license. Old Mr. Wall at once passed it over to the priest.

"Now, my dear Basil, give my respects to Mrs. Jernyngham and Miss Brooke, and ask them to come in. Then go and collect all the family, and bring them into the room."

The young midshipman, much mystified, went out to do his errand.

Mrs. Jernyngham and Berenice came in first.

"Come here, my dear child, and stand on my left hand, as the law directs," said the old man, with a smile.

Berenice came forward, and took the position indicated.

"Stand near her, to support her, dear Madam," said Mr. Wall, to the elder lady. But the request was scarcely well uttered before Mrs. Jernyngham had, of her own accord, taken up her position near her granddaughter.

A few minutes passed, and then the door opened and a silent procession entered, headed by Fulvia and Pinky Skinner, who were followed by Flavia and Pike Turner, Halcyone and Midshipman Wall, and Euripides and Martha Mossop, the old woman of all work.

They all entered looking grave, curious, and sympathetic. They did not any of them know why they were so ceremoniously summoned; but they imagined their presence might be needed as witnesses to Mr. Wall's will, or something of that sort.

"Don't crowd around the bed," said Miss Pinky. "You will keep off the fresh air from him. And he wants all he can get, I can tell you that."

And she placed chairs for her companions at a convenient distance from the invalid.

They all sat down and waited.

"They will be very much astonished at what we are about to do. But tell them, Father Bonhomme, that I have a good and sufficient reason for the act, which it is not expedient to explain now, when my time is so short," said Mr. Wall, to the priest.

Father Bonhomme repeated to the assembled company the words of the old gentleman, and added, upon his own account, that he himself could endorse the statement, by assuring his friends there present, that he knew the motives of Mr. Wall's action to be generous, honorable and disinterested. And he hoped that, if any one should feel any great wonder at what they were called to witness they would forbear to give utterance to the feeling, and would wisely suspend their judgments.

The speech served at once to raise curiosity to the highest degree and to control its manifestations.

Then, without further delay, Father Bonhomme made a signal for silence and attention, and commenced the solemn ceremony that was to wed the beautiful young girl to the dying old man.

The company looked on in wonder, curiosity and amazement

Madam Jernyngham and old Mr. Basil Wall only were composed.

Berenice stood still, pale, and cold, and gave her responses in a low, faint, expiring voice. But when the rites were over and the benediction pronounced, and when the old man took her hand and drew her still nearer to him, she stooped and met his pallid lips with a grateful kiss.

"God bless you, my sweet young wife," he said "may you be always good and happy."

Other friends drew near, not hastily or joyously, as at other bridals, but slowly and gravely; and they kissed Berenice and wished her happiness; but more as a mere matter of form, rather than anything else.

Then Miss Pinky Skinner, observing how pale and faint her patient was, advised that the room should be cleared.

And Fulvia at the same time announced that dinner was about to be placed on the table, and invited the whole company into the parlor.

All withdrew except Berenice and Pinky.

"From this moment I must beg to share your watch, Miss Skinner," said Berenice, gently.

"Well, you have a right to do it, I suppose," graciously answered Pinky; "so you may stay by him while I go down-stairs and bring up his chicken soup. It is ready, and it is time he had it."

And she left the room to do her errand.

Berenice watched by the old man. He lay very quietly and with his eyes closed. He had relapsed into that calm and dreamy state which was now his normal condition. And Berenice did not disturb him.

Miss Skinner, however, came in, bringing the soup, and, saying that he absolutely required the nourishment at that very moment, she roused him up sufficiently to partake of it.

When he had eaten with some appetite, he laid back on his pillow and fell into a deep, calm sleep.

Then Pinky took away the invalid service and soon returned and said to Berenice:

"Now do you go in and get your dinner and leave me to watch him until you get back."

"But I would rather stay myself," urged Berenice.

"Listen to me," said Miss Pinky, impatiently. "You have got to dine sometime or other and hadn't you better go and do it now, while he sleeps, so as to be back here to let him see you when he wakes up?"

"Yes, perhaps I had. Thank you, Miss Pinky, I believe you are right," said Berenice, rising and resigning her seat to Miss Skinner.

When Berenice reached the parlor, she found the family about to pass on to the dinner-table.

Young Basil Wall gave her his arm. Even the near approach of Death to the house could not quite put down the spirits of that irrepressible young middy.

"Do you know, Berry?" he said, smiling, "that I had not the slightest idea what I went to Leonardtown for? I was the bearer of sealed dispatches to the county clerk. If anybody had told me that they contained the order and the fee for a marriage license, I should have thought that body mad. Why I did not even know what I brought back, much less what I carried. The clerk, on reading my uncle's dispatches, put a document in a closed envelope and sealed it carefully and handed it to me, with these astounding words:

" 'Sir, accept my sincere congratulations; I wish you much joy in the future opening so happily and prosperously before you!'

"I'm blest, Berry, if I didn't think that he had given me a copy of my uncle's will, and that the dear old gentleman had made it in my sole favor—cutting off my sisters with—his blessing! That's what I thought the

clerk's congratulations meant on my approaching inheritance of a moderate fortune. And now I'm doubly blest if I don't see how it all was!" said the middy, with a laugh.

Berenice looked at her companion inquiringly and rebukingly.

"Oh, don't be vexed, Berry! But I'll tell you what he thought—he thought he had filled out a marriage for you and—ME! Of course you know my uncle's name and mine are the very same, and he could never imagine that you were going to marry the *old* man. There! don't be angry, Berry, I won't say another word on the subject, only this—that you may be sure, by this time, there is a report all over the neighborhood that you and I are married."

"Oh, Basil, I hope not," said Berenice, looking much annoyed.

"Why?—I think it would be fun to have such a rumor, because for once—*for* once, the rumor would not be half so astounding as the reality."

As the young midshipman whispered these consoling words they reached the dinner-table and took their places, and all confidential conversation ceased.

After dinner, Mrs. Jernyngham and Berenice repaired to Mr. Wall's room, and Miss Skinner was relieved from duty for a few hours. The old man slept well until late in the afternoon. When he waked up Mrs. Jernyngham took leave of him, promising to come to see him again very soon.

Then she returned to Henniker House to astonish its inmates with the news of Berenice Brooke's sudden marriage. The old lady had felt no misgivings on the subject of having countenanced the marriage of Rosamond Brooke's daughter without Rosamond Brooke's sanction; for even had not the circumstances so clearly justified the proceedings, she knew very well that her wisdom would be unquestioned by her dutiful descendants, and that the news she should carry to Henniker House would astonish rather than offend the household.

Old Mr. Basil Wall lingered in placid repose some few

days longer, affectionately watched by Berenice and dutifully tended by Pinky Skinner, and zealously waited on by all the rest of his family, and then he calmly and happily passed away to his eternal life.

And so Berenice Brooke fulfilled her destiny and became the seventh Widow of Widowville.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THROUGH DEATH TO LIFE."

All the Widows of Widowville as well as all the neighboring gentry, attended the funeral of Old Basil Wall. The sacred rites were solemnized at the Church of St. Rosalie, and the remains of the aged patriarch were reverently deposited in the vault under its high altar.

After the funeral Berenice returned home with her mother and friends to Henniker House.

Halcyone went back with Fulvia and Flavia to the Forest Farm. There were now many reasons why she should stay with them. Captain Storms had gone to sea, Pinky Skinner had left the place, and no one was at Stormy Point but the two men, Mr. Dickson and Harry, and the lower servants, so that it was no longer a pleasant or proper home for the young lady. On the other hand, Fulvia and Flavia, deeply depressed by the death of their kind old relative, really needed the comfort that Halcyone's company gave them.

Pinky Skinner, at Fulvia's solicitation, also remained at Forest Farm.

Young Basil Wall, whose extension of leave had not yet expired, continued to stay with his sisters.

But Pike Turner delicately withdrew from the house and soon after left the neighborhood for the far West to settle up his business with a firm of fur traders on the Upper Mississippi. But he went away as the acknowledged bethothed of the fair-haired Flavia, and with the understanding that after he should purchase and stock

a farm and build and furnish a house, he should come back to claim the hand of his affianced bride and carry her off to his Western home.

Clarence Fairlie was also a frequent visitor. Poor Clary! My reader knows already the conspiracy between Halcyone and Fulvia, which seemed to be against his peace and honor, but which was really meant to be detrimental to neither; but to promote his ultimate good and happiness.

By their mutual understanding Halcyone engaged to do all she could to disgust him, and Fulvia all *she* could to charm him.

And now wilful Halcyone was more whimsical and disagreeable than before, and beautiful Fulvia, in her deep mourning and pensive mood, more lovely and interesting than ever.

Clary struggled hard; but how could any poor, honest boy, save his soul alive, between two such wicked little girls?

He felt his integrity being demoralized, and he knew that some decided step must be taken to save it.

He saw that, if Halcyone were only staying anywhere else, where he could visit her alone, without the danger of meeting that too lovely Fulvia, he should be able to resist temptation, and keep faith with his first love.

And so he implored Halcyone to shorten her visit.

But that capricious and unreasonable young lady was not to be convinced or entreated. She positively refused to leave Forest Farm, or to permit her tortured lover to keep away from it for more than two days at a time.

Clary was at his wits' end. He knew not what was best to be done, in this dilemma.

At length he resolved to lay his case before,——whom do you suppose?

The youngest Widow of Widowville!

He went to Henniker House and asked to see Berenice. He was told that she was in the garden, and he went in search of her, and found her in her favorite retreat, a pretty vine-clad arbor.

He opened his heart to her more freely than he could

have done to his father-confessor. But then he knew, instinctively, that, in his case, a *mother-confessor* is so much better.

He told her all his troubles; his marriage engagement with Halcyone, and his desire and purpose to keep faith with her—and then of his involuntary love for Fulvia, his hard struggle to overcome it, and the great difficulty, amounting to absolute impossibility, of his doing so, while Halcyone refused either to leave the side of Fulvia, or permit him to absent himself from her.

"I have implored Halcyone to leave the Forest Farm, but she firmly refuses to do so. I cannot control myself forever! Some day I shall betray my feelings towards Fulvia, and then—all will be over with my honor—my honor which has never yet been stained," said the boy, in a tone of desperation.

"Take comfort. You mean to do right. But have you told Halcyone your reasons for wishing her to end her visit?" said Berenice.

"Oh, no; I have not yet had the moral courage to do so," answered Clary.

"You feared too much to give her pain."

"I have no right to suppose that anything I might say or do could give her pain. By my miserable inconstancy, I have forfeited such a right," said Poor Clary—who really had no personal vanity of his own, and who was bent on preserving the dignity of his betrothed from the suspicion of continuing to take an interest in one who no longer loved her.

"Does she suspect, then, your feelings towards Fulvia?" inquired Berenice.

"I—believe she does," replied Clary, hesitatingly.

"Does Fulvia suspect them?"

"I—sometimes fear she does."

"And does she respond to them?"

Clarence blushed violently, and remained silent.

"I am answered," said Berenice, calmly.

"Oh, no; indeed, you are not," eagerly exclaimed Clary. If I have said or done anything to produce the impres-

sion that Miss Wall has ever noticed or favored my sentiments, I have been entirely wrong."

"Clary, my friend," said Berenice, gravely, "your path of duty appears to me to be very clear."

"Point it out to me, dear Berenice, and I will follow it. All I wish to know, is what is right to be done?"

"I believe you. Listen, then. I will make you the bearer of a written note of invitation to Halcyone, to come and visit me for a few weeks, to cheer me during my period of retirement. She will scarcely refuse my request. You may then follow it up by informing her of your danger, and imploring her, for all our sakes, to accept my invitation."

"Do you mean that I must really tell her of my inconstancy to her, and my attachment to another?" groaned Clary.

"Yes, you must tell her every thing as freely as you have told me. You owe thus much to *her* rights and to *your* own honor."

"It will be a terrible trial," exclaimed Clary, with a shudder.

"But a necessary one, which you should bravely meet."

"I wish it were done and over."

"Get it done and over at once. When there is anything painful to be undertaken, the sooner it is done the better—to save disagreeable anticipations."

"How like a sage you speak, dear Berry. Is it your widow's weeds that make you so wise?"

"Perhaps. But that is wide of our subject. Let us return to it. You are going to the Forest Farm to-day?"

"Yes; I was on my way there, feeling, as usual, very painfully perplexed, when a sudden inspiration sent me here to consult you. I am very glad I came, Berry, though the counsel you give me is just about the most painful to follow that you could devise. But I know it is the best way—and, in fact, the only way—out of my difficulties, and so I *do* thank you very much, indeed," said Clarence, fervently.

"Well, so you are on your way there now?"

"Yes."

"Then I will not detain you, but I will go at once and write my note to Halcyone, so that you can take it," said Berry, rising and hurrying into the house.

Clarence also arose and walked up and down the shaded garden-paths until the return of Berenice, who came, bearing the note in her hand.

"You must ask for Halcyone, and give this to her when you find her alone. This will open the way for you to make your explanation. I advise you also to offer to get a carriage and bring Halcyone over here, yourself," said Berenice, as she put the paper in his hands.

"How shall I thank you, dear Berry?" inquired the grateful boy, holding out his hand to take leave of his lovely friend.

"You need not thank me at all, or at least not in any other way than by doing your duty, however painful that may be," said the young widow, smiling.

"I will—I will indeed, dear friend. Your good counsel and kind sympathy give me courage to do it," said Clarence, raising her hand respectfully to his lips and bowing his adieux.

Now, of course, Berenice knew no more of the real state of affairs at Forest Farm than did Clarence himself. She was entirely ignorant of the snare laid by Halcyone and Fulvia for poor Clarence, and into which he had inevitably fallen. So she was quite unconscious that the counsel she had given him was not only the best possible for the preservation of his honor, but for the immediate promotion of his happiness. Still less did Clarence imagine that this would be the case.

His anticipations were all a "fearful looking forward to of judgment."

From Halcyone's recent conduct he had not the slightest reason to hope that she would be so magnanimous as to release him from his engagement, or even that she would be so generous while holding him to it, as to forgive him for his involuntary infidelity of heart. He had nothing to expect from her but violent hysterics, bitter reproaches, and obstinate opposition to all his wishes of

whatever nature. But he resolved to face all this in the discharge of what he now saw clearly was his duty.

So he rode on to the Forest Farm. He rode on slowly —very slowly; for though he could go straight to martyrdom, indeed, indeed he could not hurry to it as to a festival, and you ought not to expect it of him.

Thus it happened that between his delay at Henniker House and his leisurely way of going towards Forest Farm, he was several hours behind the time of his usual visit, and it was late in the day when he drew rein at the horse-block, before the old farm-house.

He dismounted and secured his horse, and was about to enter that hospitable dwelling, whose doors stood open all day long in good weather, when he chanced to spy the flutter of Halcyone's pink dress and pink ribbons down one of the green garden-walks.

He immediately turned in that direction, opened the garden gate and went in.

A glance over her shoulder showed Halcyone who was there; but she walked on as if she had not seen him. He was behind time, and she was resolved to resent it; for she had not remitted one degree of her severity in disciplining her unhappy lover.

He hurried after her and overtook her.

"Good afternoon, dear Halcyone," he said, taking off his hat, and carrying it in his hand, as he walked beside her.

"Humph! Good *night*, I think you had better say, sir! You are very late! I suppose you have been paying your *'distresses'* to some other lady," sneered Halcyone, jerking away from him the hand he had taken.

As this sort of charge was nothing at all unusual, it did not surprise Clary in the least, though it annoyed him as much as if he had never heard the like before. Perhaps it even troubled him more than ever; for though Halcyone spoke sarcastically, she came nearer the literal truth than she had ever come before.

He had not been "paying" his *addresses* to any lady, as Halcyone knew very well. But he certainly had been *laying* his "distresses" before the youngest widow of

Widowville, as Halcyone did not know. He felt this, and knowing also the trouble that was before him, he answered deprecatingly:

"Indeed, Halcyone, I have not been doing anything whatever that should give you offence."

"Oh, I don't care what you have been doing! You needn't presume to think that I do," she snapped.

"I have no right to expect you to care for me, dear Halcyone," answered Clarence, more deprecatingly than before.

"That's because your conscience pricks you!" sneered Halcyone, again nearing the truth.

"Dear Halcyone——"

"What made you so late? Tell me that!" she exclaimed, ruthlessly interrupting him.

"I had a call to make on my way here."

"A call! a call! a call on some woman, I'll be bound!" she exclaimed, with flashing eyes and flushing cheeks, for she was a good actress, and could work herself up to a very well counterfeited passion.

"Halcyone, dearest——"

"—Hold your tongue, you deceitful little monster!" she cried, stamping at him.

Clary threw up his hands and plucked at his golden locks in desperation.

"Now tell me, you heart-breaking little brute, that you have *not* been calling on a woman! Look me in the face, if you dare, and tell me that!"

"Yes, Halcyone, I have, but——"

"I knew it! I knew it!" she exclaimed, in triumph.

Clarence looked at her deprecatingly.

"Whom have you been calling on? Tell me that, sir. I'll tear her eyes out, whoever she is! See if I don't. Who is she, I ask you? Can't you speak?"

"Dear Halcyone, no one who should excite your jealousy or anger. She——"

"My jealousy and anger!" fiercely interrupted the little actress. "Do you presume to think that I would condescend to be jealous or angry with you or your sweethearts?"

"Forgive me, Halcyone. I did not mean to offend you. Nor was the lady on whom I called——"

"Who was she, I say?" cried Halcyone, stamping.

"Your gentle friend, Berenice——"

"My gentle friend! Who told you she was my friend?" She'll not be my friend much longer, if she behaves in this way! So, it is she you have been calling on! And her old husband not dead two weeks yet! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Dear, dear Halcyone! I implore you to listen to me patiently. I have something to say to you—something that is of the most vital importance to your own happiness as well as to mine," said Clarence, taking her hand, and gazing into her face, with the most earnest and prayerful expression in his whole countenance. His manner thus, at last, commanded her attention. She saw it meant more than merely to soothe her ill-humor and ward off her hysterics. So she became really attentive, though seemingly sulky. And, as she studied him, she even fancied that the crisis towards which she had been driving him was now at hand. And she was the more willing it should come, because young Harry Storms, wearied out of patience with the loneliness of Stormy Point since the departure of Halcyone, Pinky and the old captain, had taken to visiting the Forest Farm. Love and Hope are twin sisters. Halcyone loved Harry, and hoped that he missed her enough at Stormy Point to seek her society at Forest Farm. So she was very willing to come to an understanding with Clarence.

"Go on," she said to him, at length.

But now that he had got her ear, he was a most afraid to "go on." He dreaded so much her well-acted outbreaks of temper. He hesitated some moments, and then concluded that he would lead to the disagreeable explanation by handing her the note from Berenice. He put it in her hand without a word.

"Oh!" said Halcyone, as soon as she had read it, "so she wants me to come and stay with her at Henniker?"

"Yes. I called at the house this morning, saw Berenice and had a little talk with her——"

Halcyone tossed her head. But this was done only to keep up her assumed character of a jealous vixen a little longer, to avoid dropping it too suddenly. Clary tried not to notice it, and went on bravely.

"Very soon Berenice asked me take a note to you, and she detained me while she went out to write it. When she came back and put it in my hand, she told me it contained a pressing invitation for you to come to her. And believing that I might possibly have some little influence with you, she requested me to back her invitation with my own entreaties that you would accept it. And now, my dearest girl, listen to me seriously, while I assure you in the most solemn manner, that I undertook this mission all the more willingly, because I myself have a heavy stake in its success."

"*You?*—what stake can you have?" inquired Halcyone with a slight sneer, for she would not throw off her disguise so soon.

"*My honor,*" gravely replied the boy.

"Your honor? How on earth can your honor be concerned in my going or not to Henniker House?"

Clarence looked at her sorrowfully and solemnly for a moment, and then suddenly sank on his knees before her.

"What is the meaning of this, Clary?" inquired Halcyone, now really interested, and somewhat frightened, and altogether forgetful of her role.

"Nowhere but at your feet, dear Halcyone, can I make the humiliating confession that I must make," began the boy, and his bowed head and deeply flushed brow and tearful eyes and trembling or tightly compressed lips and laboring bosom showed how profound was the honest shame he felt in his most innocent inconstancy.

Halcyone understood it all now. She knew that the honorably young heart had been tried to its utmost powers of endurance, and that it was about to cast its load of self-imputed sin at her feet. And notwithstanding the happy end that was to be attained, her own heart reproached her for the harsh means she had taken to this end. She could not speak to him just then. She could

hardly keep her tears back, as he, with a dejected air and broken voice, went on:

"Halcyone—oh, how shall I speak the words that are on my lips? Halcyone—your reproaches have been well deserved. I am worse than your worst thoughts of me have ever suspected. I am falser than your fiercest jealousy has ever pictured. Oh, Halcyone, it is true! My weak and wretched heart has gone from its truth and honor. And I—I——" he choked, and stopped, and then with a burst of anguished exclaimed—"I love some one else."

And then he covered his face with his hands and dropped his head on his bosom.

Halcyone could scarcely help crying, she pitied him so much. But there was nothing like tears in the tone with which she said:

"Do get up, Clary! Who the mischief ever heard of a man going down on his knees to one girl to confess his love for another?" And at the drollery of the idea she could now scarcely keep from laughing. "Come! give me your hand to help you up and let us go and sit down on the bench there; for you are completely used up."

This address took the youth completely by surprise. He had no right from any precedent to expect anything but fierce reproaches and violent hysterics. And here he met only a gentle sarcasm. In much amazement he arose and followed her to a garden seat that stood under an old poplar tree on the lawn.

"Oh, Halcyone! Halcyone!" he said, as he sank down by her side on the bench—"kill me, for I deserve death! kill me!"

"I wouldn't do it to save your life! there! Why they'd hang, or at the very least shut me up in a lunatic asylum! Come, Clary! the only reparation you can make me now is to make a clean breast of it. Who is the beautiful, accomplished and altogether lovely and beloved individual who has supplanted me in your valuable affections?" inquired the girl, with playful raillery.

"Oh, Halcyone! I do not deserve this gentle treatment!

It breaks my heart more than your bitterest reproaches could!" groaned poor Clary, in deep contrition.

"Stow all that trash and tell me the woman's name," was the gracious advice given by the girl.

"The beautiful Fulvia Wall!" exclaimed the boy, and then as if the very name of his beloved inspired him into courage, he exclaimed—"Oh, Halcyone! Halcyone! who could look on that glorious creature and not adore her?"

"Pleasant words for me to hear!" murmured Halcyone with a merry twinkle in her eyes.

"Ah! I should not have uttered them, I know. But I hardly know what I say or what I ought to say. I know her loveliness is no excuse for my inconstancy. Had she been a thousand times as lovely as she is, I had no right to love her. There is no excuse for me, yet if I could venture to implore your pardon, Halcyone, I should pray you to let my grief and shame plead for me."

"Well, what is it that you wish me to do, Clary? Do you wish me to release you from your engagement to me?" inquired Halcyone, kindly.

"No!" answered the loyal-souled boy, most emphatically—"no, Halcyone; if I cannot control my feelings under all conditions, at least, I can and will control my actions. No, Halcyone; to ask you to release me would be equivalent to breaking with you, whether you would or not; for if I were to ask you to release me, you would certainly do it, whether you liked to do so or not. No, dear Halcyone, I am not so base as that! You are my bethothed wife. I owe you my love and faith. I have confessed to you my faults and troubles as I would confide them to my wife, not to get you to release me from my obligations to you, but to get you to help me to be true to them."

"Clary! Clary, darling," said Halcyone, with a voice full of emotion and eyes full of tears, "Clary, I had no idea how good and noble you really were! Clary, I never in my life loved and honored you so much as I do at this moment. Now tell me freely what you want me to do."

"Thanks, dear Halcyone, thanks! I do not merit your kindness to me now; but indeed, Heaven helping me, I

will try to merit it in the future," said the youth, in much emotion.

"What shall I do on my part then, Clary?"

"I wish you to help me to be true to myself and you, dear Halcyone."

"How can I do that, Clary?"

"By leaving this place, and going to Henniker House. So long as you stay here, and I visit you here to be thrown in the constant society of your fascinating friend, just so long I shall find difficulty—perhaps, impossibility in overcoming my—my attraction towards her. But once out of her sphere, Halcyone, I shall be able to conquer the feelings that I know to be wrong."

"I do not," began Halcyone, softly,—but she finished the sentence,—"think that you will," only in her thoughts.

"For this reason, dear Halcyone, I wish you to go to Henniker House. I, also, have an invitation there, which I shall accept. There I shall devote myself to you, and we will both forget Forest Farm and its inmates."

"I do not think that Fulvia Wall is a girl to be forgotten easily," said Halcyone, shaking her head.

"Heaven help me, she is not!" groaned Clarence; "but yet I will——"

"Then why forget her at all?" interrupted Halcyone.

"Why? Ah, my dear girl, do *you* ask me that question?" inquired Clary, in sorrowful surprise.

"Yes, I do; and I flatter myself it is a very sensible question, too. And so I repeat it: Why should you forget her? And I add to it: Why should you not love her, and woo her, and win her, and wed her, if you wish to do so?" inquired Halcyone, in her most assured manner.

"You are mocking me, Halcyone, and I deserve that you should. But hear me. Although my miserable heart wandered from its love and faith, yet I have never by so much as a word or look *betrayed*, far less expressed, my feelings to that young lady. And when I ask you to let me fly from the temptation to do so, I speak in simple truth and good faith towards you, her, and myself. And I pray you, my betrothed wife—by the vows that we have exchanged, and as we are to go hand in hand down the

path of life together, sharing each other's joys and griefs, sustaining each other in our duties—I pray you not to release me from the sacred obligations that bind me, but to help me to keep true to them."

"Clary, I never did—no, I never *did* love and honor you so much as I do at this present moment. I had no idea what a rare, noble soul you have! Loving beautiful Fulvia as you do, and having, I must confess, every reason to suppose your love returned, you are willing to make the sacrifice of——"

"Stay, dear," gently interrupted Clarence, "I have never, even in my inmost thoughts, called it a sacrifice. A clear and simple act of duty is not such."

"But it would be a sacrifice all the same—a sacrifice of your own and your love's happiness. And I would like to ask you, who demands it of you? *I* do not."

"Truth, honor, duty demand it," gravely answered the youth.

"They do not," said Halcyone.

"Do not? How can you say that, dearest? What do you mean?" inquired Clary, in much suspense.

Halcyone paused in much embarrassment on her side.

Once it had seemed to her that it would be perfectly easy when the time should come, for her to tell Clary of the little plot that had been laid against him for his own good, and then to laugh at him and release him. But now the youth had revealed his nature in such a new light of pure honor, aye, and of unswerving firmness in the discharge of duty too, that Halcyone, as she had said, felt a great increase of esteem and respect for him, so that she blushed at the thought of telling him the truth.

How could she tell this loyal soul that he had been practiced upon and managed? The longer she reflected, the more perplexed she became. And yet, she felt that some explanation was immediately necessary; for Clary's clear, honest, blue eyes were fixed upon her face, waiting for her answer.

Then all of a sudden came her inspiration to say nothing to him about the plot which had proved so successful; but to take half the blame for the present state of affairs

upon herself, and to release her betrothed without wounding his self-love.

"I mean what I said, Clary," she murmured, seeing that he still waited for an answer to his question—"I mean what I said; neither truth, honor, nor duty, no, nor pity, nor interest, nor expediency, 'nor any other creature,' require you to marry me, while you love Fulvia."

"But, dear, I will conquer my love for Fulvia," began Clarence.

"I hope you will do nothing of the sort. No one requires that of you either."

"Halcyone——"

"Listen to me, Clary. Our betrothal—yours and mine—was a blunder. We did not love each other well enough to justify our engagement. And I think it very fortunate that we have discovered this of our hearts before that engagement was made irrevocable by marriage and we ourselves made wretched for life."

"Halcyone, you amaze me! Is it possible that *your* heart has changed too?" exclaimed Clarence, under his breath.

"No, Clary, my heart has not changed—except in this, that I have a greater regard for you now that I am about to break with you, than I had the day I promised to marry you. No, dear Clary, in the sense you mean, my heart has never changed. Much as I always really loved you, dear Clary, I never, never loved you enough to justify my marrying you."

"This is a revelation indeed," murmured Clarence, as if to himself.

"And yet it should not surprise you. Carry your memory back, dear Clary, to the days, not so long ago, when you first did me honor to ask me to be your wife. Looking on that past, through the light of this present, can you not see, though I loved you, how much I objected to marrying you?"

Clarence dropped his head upon his bosom and reflected for a few moments, and then answered, gravely:

"I beg your pardon, Halcyone, but your demeanor then did seem very strange, changeable and capricious."

"It was because I loved you enough to care for your happiness; but not enough to marry you," said Halcyone.

"Then why did you consent?" asked Clary, raising his eyebrows, and staring at her with his clear, blue eyes.

Halcyone smiled to herself. Was it possible, she thought, that Clary had forgotten that he himself had terrified her into consenting to marry him? She might have revived his recollection, but as she could not do that without wounding his self-esteem, she forbore to reply.

"Why in the world did you consent to marry me when you did not wish to do it?" repeated Clary, who was very anxious now to be convinced that Halcyone had never loved him.

"Oh, you see, Clary, there are a great many weak people who cannot bear to give pain, and don't know how to say no. I am one of those people. Though it half-killed me to say yes, I could not bear to wound you by saying no."

"And so, not loving me, you yet consented out of pity to marry me?" said the young man, with a humiliated look.

"Not quite so, either, dear Clary. I *did* love you, though not enough to wish to marry you. And because I *did* love you, I did not wish to wound you by a refusal."

"And yet even since our engagement you have seemed to value, yes, even to *over*-value my love." murmured the young man, with a perplexed look.

"And to plague you nearly to death with my jealousy also you would say, but that you would spare my feelings. Well, Clarence, dear, if my temper has been capricious and very trying, you must ascribe the fact to the false position in which we were both placed. Listen to me, Clary: You never knew your little friend and playmate, Halcyone, to be ill-tempered, did you?"

"No, indeed: I had always known her the sweetest, sunniest tempered creature that ever lived," earnestly answered the youth.

"It was only as your bethothed that she showed herself in the guise of a weak, jealous, spiteful little shrew?"

"Only as my betrothed."

"Then you must see that the false position was in fault.

Make your betrothed only your little playmate again and Halcyone will be herself. Come Clary! Shake hands on it! We shall love each other better than ever after we are free," she said, holding out her hand with a smile.

He caught it and pressed it to his lips, almost with the ardor of a lover.

"Thank you, Halcyone! My dear little friend, thank you! I *have* been managed! I feel that I have, though you would mercifully conceal the fact from me. I have; but I am content, since I must acknowledge I have been so well managed."

CHAPTER XV.

HAPPY LOVE.

"WELL, dear Clary, if you say so, I'll not contradict you. And now let us saunter on to the house as if nothing unusual had been said between us. Fulvia and Flavia are expecting you to tea. Basil is also home to-day, and I shouldn't wonder if Harry Storms were to join us before the afternoon is over," said Halcyone, rising.

"Harry must be dreadfully moped up there, at Stormy Point, now that you and Miss Pinky are away and there is nobody left in the house but himself and Mr. Dickson and the servants," said Clarence, glad to change the subject of conversation, as he arose and walked on by the side of Halcyone towards the house.

"Dreadfully, poor fellow! but he don't stay about home much now, that is certain."

"Well, he's in the right of it," laughed Clarence.

As they were about to enter the old farm-house, Halcyone paused, with her foot upon the threshold, to say one last word to her young companion.

"Clary," she said, "I shall immediately accept Berry's invitation and go to Henniker House, not for the purpose you first proposed—of separating you from Fulvia—but for the very opposite one of leaving this field clear for

your future operations. I shall tell Fulvia, before I go, that all is over between you and me, that we have broken off our engagement by mutual consent, and with so little of ill-feeling that we are actually better friends now than we have ever been before. Then, after I have left, you may go in and win."

"Thank you, dear Halcyone. And oh, may Heaven make you as happy as you have made me!"

"Stow that! Hold your tongue, Clary! Have you no more tact than to go into raptures of gratitude to one woman for releasing you from a marriage engagement with herself, in order to let you enter into another with some other woman?" exclaimed Halcyone, with a touch of her old perversity.

Before Clary could find words to reply to this raillery, the front door was pulled open by Fulvia, who had seen the pair approaching, and had come to meet them.

She welcomed Clarence with her usual fullness of cordiality, and took them both into the house, where the table was set for tea, and where young Basil, Flavia and Pinky were waiting for them.

Fulvia saw at once, by the relieved and happy expressions on the faces of her young friends, that they had at last had a mutual explanation and had come to a satisfactory understanding.

In this pleasant mood they all sat down to the table.

Miss Pinky Skinner presided at the tea-board, as she usually did.

When the evening meal was over, the little company run out, as was their custom in the fine spring weather, and promenaded on the lawn before the house.

Basil, good-naturedly, walked with Miss Pinky Skinner, and quite exerted himself to be agreeable to her.

Harry Storms came up smiling and hat in hand to join them as soon as they appeared on the green, and shook hands cordially with all the young people, and then attached himself particularly to Flavia.

Clarence sauntered by the side of Halcyone.

Fulvia rambled on along until Halcyone whispered to her companion:

"Clary, I want to go and talk to Fulvia now. And I would be much obliged to you if you would just have the kindness in the meantime to lounge along near Flavia, if it is only to prevent Harry Storms from trying to flirt with Pike Turner's sweetheart."

And in giving this advice, you know, Halcyone spoke two words for her own interest, to one for Pike Turner's.

"Does Harry know Flavia is engaged to Pike?" inquired Clary, elevating his eyebrows.

"To be sure he knows it— I took care to tell him myself," said Halcyone.

"Then there is no excuse for him, for he *is* trying to flirt with her, and I'll put a stop to it," exclaimed honest Clary, in a fit of righteous indignation.

"And I will soon know whether he really comes here to see *me* or *her*," said Halcyone, following Clary with her eyes. "I will go to Henniker House. Then if Harry leaves off visiting here, and takes to spending his evenings there, I shall know what he means." And with these words she joined Fulvia.

The two girls then loitered behind the others.

"You have something to tell me," said Fulvia, looking up with a smile.

"Yes," answered Halcyone, putting Berenice's note in her hand.

"Oh, is this all? I thought by your happy face that you had at length 'got your free papers,' as the darkies say —that is, that you had effected a deliverance from your engagement with your 'little brute of a boy lover,' and here you have only got an invitation to go to Henniker House and all your delight is simply caused by your prospect of leaving us and going to Berenice," said Fulvia, with a look and tone partly of real, partly of affected modification.

"Not so fast, if you please. I thought you were too wise to jump to conclusions like the rest of our weak sex. I have got that invitation to go to Henniker House, which I shall accept. I have also got my 'free papers,' as you choose to call them, and I am emancipated from my reluctant engagement of my 'little brute of a boy lover.'

And the note of invitation, and the free papers and the loosed bonds are parts and parcels of the same plan," said Halcyone, archly.

"Oh-h-h!" breathed Fulvia, with a long inspiration, "I think I begin to understand it all now. But tell me all about it."

Halcyone, keeping fast hold of her companion's arm, drew her still farther in the rear of their party, lest their conversation should be overheard, and then entered into an explanation of all that had passed between Clarence Farlie and herself. She concluded by saying:

"So you see the noble fellow, after confessing the wandering of his affections from me to you, placed his destiny in my hands, and threw himself upon my mercy, entreating me *not to release* him from what he termed his 'sacred obligations' to myself, but to help him to keep true to them by leaving this place and taking him from temptation."

"And so you agreed to that proposal? And that is your motive for going to Henniker House?" inquired Fulvia, in a faint voice.

"No—how can you be so forgetful? Haven't I just told you—didn't I begin by telling you that my acceptance of that invitation and my deliverance from that engagement were parts of the same plan?" impatiently demanded Halcyone.

"Oh, so you did! Forgive me; I am nervous and confused to-day," sighed Fulvia.

"I should think you were," mercilessly assented Halcyone—"no, Fulvia, I did not agree to his noble proposal, nor accept his great sacrifice; nor yet could I bring myself to confess to the whole-souled, true-hearted fellow, that I had been practicing upon him, purposely to alienate his affections from myself and to direct them to you. I couldn't confess that to him, Fulvia,—I couldn't, indeed."

"I am very glad, upon all accounts, that you did not."

"No, but I took half the blame upon myself, and acknowledged that I never *had* loved him well enough to marry him. You should have seen his honest surprise. His big, blue eyes were a sight to behold, as he fixed them upon mine and asked me why in the world I had ever con-

sented to marry him when I did not like to do so. Ah, poor fellow, he is so infatuated with *you* now, that he has totally forgotten how he frightened *me* into promising to marry him."

"And—you did not remind him of it?" anxiously inquired Fulvia.

"Who—I? Am I a fool? No, indeed. I would not have wounded his self-respect by recalling his boyish folly for the world. No; I took my honest half of the blame, and let him think me as weak and capricious as he pleased. And so—to make a long story short—I made him understand that, though I loved and esteemed him passing well as a friend and companion, yet I should be even gladder than himself to be freed from our too hasty engagement. And thus we dissolved partnership to our mutual satisfaction. And I assure you that we were never dearer friends than when we shook hands and agreed to be nothing more than friends."

"And so that matter is finally settled," said Fulvia, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Yes," responded Halcyone, echoing the sigh and the sentiment.

Then, why must you go to Henniker House!" inquired Fulvia.

"Why?—oh, Fulvia, didn't you see, my dear?"

"No."

"Why, to leave the field free to *you*. You know you like him almost as much as he likes you. You never acknowledged as much to me, never even betrayed as much —no, not even by a look. You would have died first, of course. But still I *have* somehow received the impression that you *do* like poor Clary a little. And I am sure, Fulvia, if I should discover, after all, that you *don't* like like him, I should be just beaten down by remorse."

"There—there—dear Halcyone, that will do! Let us change the subject to some other one—your visit to Henniker House, for instance. When do you intend to grieve us all by going?" said Fulvia, deeply blushing.

"That won't do at all, Fulvia! I don't intend to be put off so. I must be satisfied in regard to my dear Clary

first. Though I throw him *off*, Fulvia, I do not mean to throw him *away*. I throw him toward *you*. And if you don't hold out your arms and catch him quick—if you do let him fall to the ground, I'll never forgive you. And moreover——"

"Hush, hush, Halcy! He shall not fall hard enough to hurt himself," said Fulvia, with a smile and a blush.

"All right. Now I will talk about my visit to Henniker House. I want to go to-morrow morning. And I shall get Clary to go by there on his way home this evening, to tell Berry that I am much obliged for her kind invitation and shall respond to it in person by making my appearance in good time for their early dinner."

"We shall miss you very much," said Fulvia, seriously.

"Flavia and Basil may; but you won't. Clary will make up to you for the loss of me, I feel sure. Well—these spring evenings are short and chilly. Let us go in."

They returned to the house, where they were soon joined by the other members of the party. The evening was passed in those very quiet recreations which the recent death in the family and the respect due to the memory of old Basil Wall permitted.

Clarence took leave earlier than usual, because he was to be the bearer of a note from Halcyone to Berenice, and he wished to reach Henniker House in time to deliver it that same evening.

The next morning Halcyone bade good-bye to her dear friends of Forest Farm; and mounted on her spirited little pony, and escorted by Midshipman Wall on the finest horse in the farm stables, she rode over to Henniker House. It had been arranged that her luggage should be sent after her in the farm wagon—that same capacious wagon which, set upon runners, has once figured in these pages in a memorable sleigh-ride.

Halcyone and her escort, after a delightful canter through some of the most beautiful scenery in that region, arrived at Henniker House, where they were received by the ladies with the greatest cordiality.

Berenice at once claimed Halcyone as her own, and carried her off to the pretty room on the second floor

front, which had always been reserved for the use of this eccentric little girl.

"It is very good of you, my dear Halcyone, to come over here and share my seclusion," said Berenice, affectionately kissing her visitor.

"It is good of you, Berry, to invite me. Don't you suppose I know what you do it for?"

"Clarence told you?"

"Oh, no; not in so many words. He never said, 'Berenice has invited you to Henniker House on purpose to separate me from Fulvia Wall.' Oh, no; Clary never did anything so dull as that. But he gave me your note of invitation, and instantly upon the back of that urged me to accept it, and confessed to me his inconstancy, and told me also that you had invited him to join me here. So you see, Berry, I should have been a fool indeed not to have been able to put all those related parts of a whole together, and understand that you had invited him and me here in order to separate him from Fulvia, and to keep us both together. And I thank you very much, dear Berry; yours was a wise thought. By the way, Berry, I have heard of a fool's cap all the days of my life. I wonder whether there is such a thing as a wisdom cap, and if it is all the same with a widow's cap?" archly inquired Halcyone, as she contemplated Berenice's sombre head-dress.

"Almost the very question your lover asked me. By the way, when may we expect him here?" inquired Berenice.

"If by my 'lover' you allude to Mr. Clarence Fairlie, I really don't know how to answer you; for I don't the least know when he is coming," replied Halcyone, with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Why, what now? Have you had a misunderstanding?" inquired Berenice in surprise.

"No, indeed, we understand each other better than we ever did in our lives," laughed Halcyone.

"That seems to be spoken sarcastically, and may mean that you have discovered all sorts of antagonisms in each other, and have parted in displeasure."

"Not at all. We are better friends than we ever were before."

"And yet he is not coming here to see you?"

"No."

"I invited you here not less for his sake than for mine."

"I know it, and I came here not less for his sake than for yours."

"You speak in riddles."

"And you are not good at guessing them."

"No, indeed."

"Then I will solve them for you," said Halcyone. And thereupon she sat down on the little chintz lounge under the window, pulled Berenice down beside her, and entered into an explanation of her whole conduct in relation to Clarence Fairlie. How first of all, to get away from the unwelcome attentions of his cousin, Ernest Blackistone, she had systematically sought the side of Clarence Fairlie, whose delicate and girlish beauty led her to forget his real age, and to continue to think of him only as a boy. How, thinking it perfectly safe and right to take refuge from Blackistone's persecutions in this 'boy's' company, she had continued to prefer and make much of him, until she had actually won his heart and turned his head. How this had continued a long time before she had suspected it. How at length his declaration of love came upon her at the surprise-party like a thunder-clap. How she had repelled the youth's advances, until his desperation and violence of behavior had frightened her for his safety, and she was driven first to temporize with him, and then to compromise her liberty by a promise to marry him. How then the despair was only shifted from Clary's heart to her own, and how fearfully she had suffered in the prospect of becoming his wife, until in a happy hour she confided her troubles to Fulvia Wall, and sought the counsel of that discreet young lady. Lastly, how they had laid their heads together to plot for her liberation, and Clary's ultimate welfare and happiness.

"Our plan was—not that I should absolutely break

with Clary and reject his suit, because such a course would have driven the little madman desperate; but on the contrary, that I should be as jealous, despotic and exacting of his attentions as I possibly could be—so as to disgust and repel his love; while on the other hand Fulvia was to do all that a young lady with due regard to delicacy and propriety could do, to please and attract him. *I* was playing a part, but Fulvia was not. She really liked the little fellow."

Here Berenice slowly turned her head from side to side in grave disapprobation.

"Oh, never shake your widow's cap at me! What could *I* do? I hated having a part to play as much as anybody could. I hated it so much that I even tried to *be* what I seemed. I tried to *be* jealous and spiteful and despotic, for I thought it was even better to feel these evil passions in reality, than to pretend to feel them when I didn't. Oh, Berry, you know I always hated a fraud, and of all other frauds I hated a *'pious fraud,'* the worst. And here I was forced by my fate to enact a pious fraud."

"Halcy! Halcy! no one is ever forced by fate to do evil!"

"Now don't say that. What could I do? I couldn't reject the little wretch; because he had threatened to take his own life if I did. And I tell you, Berry, while his madness lasted he was capable of doing it, too. Such things have been; you know it. And I didn't want to see Clary with *'that across his throat,'* which Tennyson talks about, you know. Ugh! What's the use of pursuing the subject. If the success of a plan is any proof of its merit, then our plan was most meritorious, for it was perfectly successful. Clary became disgusted with me, and charmed with Fulvia. But I suspect he told you all this yesterday?

"He confessed to me that his constancy was in danger; but he spoke of you only with tenderness and respect."

"He is a rare, noble soul, if I did call him a little wretch!" exclaimed Halcyone, with a burst of admiration. "He opened his heart to me, also—spoke to me as

his betrothed wife who was to be his counsellor and comforter through life, and appealed to my conscience—not, as he said, to release him from his sacred obligation to me, but to help to keep true to them, by coming here and withdrawing him from temptation."

"A pure, high heart. I do not see why you could not love him."

"Nor I. We *may* love good, handsome, intellectual people, but we don't love them *because* they are so, or I should love Clary. No, not because they are so. Now what *do* we ever love anybody for? The problem is beyond me. Can your widow's cap solve it?"

Berenice smiled and shook her head.

"Well, when my high-souled Clary had made this confession and appeal to me, of course there followed as full an explanation between us as I could well make without exposing my own tactics or wounding his pride. I made him very happy, by convincing him that I loved him only as a brother, and leaving him free to woo and win Fulvia. And to further that purpose, and no other, I have accepted your invitation to come here, Berenice."

"And you have almost justified yourself, dear Halcyone," said Berenice, kissing her visitor.

Halcyone passed several calm and cheerful days at Henniker House. She felt but one anxiety—as to whether Harry Storms had been seeking *her* society in his daily visits to the Forest Farm.

"And this anxiety was soon set at rest.

On the day after her arrival at Henniker House, Mr. Harry made his appearance there, and in the most straightforward and unmistakable manner asked to see Miss McAlpine.

Halcyone received him alone in the drawing-room, and also bore Mrs. Jernyngham's invitation to him to stay.

Harry expressed himself only too happy to escape from the solitude of Stormy Point not to gratefully accept the lady's offered hospitality.

And after this Harry became a frequent and welcome visitor at Henniker House. And as it was now generally understood in the family that Halcyone's hand was free

again—and as nothing could have pleased the Widows of Widowville more than to have promoted a marriage between Harry and Halcyone, which they knew would be so gratifying to their old friend, Captain Storms—they did all they could to encourage the young man.

But whether young Mr. Storms really did come courting Miss McAlpine, or whether he only came killing time, no one, not even the young lady herself, could have told. His manner towards her was what it always had been, that of an affectionate brother towards his little sister. Halcyone did not understand him. He did not quite understand himself. How long this state of things might have lasted it would be hard to say. And one day chance brought about an explanation.

Harry was sitting by the side of Halcyone on one of the garden seats under a great poplar tree. She was working a pair of slippers; and he was playing with the tassels of her dress, or the ends of her ringlets—taking harmless little liberties, clearly warranted by their state of foster-brother-and-sisterhood. At last he dropped the bright curl and sighed heavily. Now poor Harry was a great big fellow like his father. He had a tremendous chest (that's why little, tiny Halcyone liked him), so when he sighed it was not like a poet, but like a whale.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Harry?" demanded Halcyone, in her petulant little way.

"I am thinking what an ass I have been," answered the young man.

"La! is that all? Why if everybody sighed for the same cause our atmosphere would be as troubled as the waters of the Stygian Lake. Brace up, Harry. You've got plenty to keep you in countenance, only the others are either happily ignorant of their asinine nature or else bear it with cheerfulness," said Halcyone.

"I suppose you are working those slippers for the *happy man*," surmised Harry, with a look of envy he could not keep out of his countenance.

Halcyone laid down her work and looked at him, and reflected, before she answered:

"For the 'happy man?' Who is he? Where is he?

Has any one ever seen him? Has any one ever heard of him? Be sure if I knew where to find him, I would embroider him, not only a pair of slippers, but a whole suit! But I don't, and so I can't. Happy men are not as plenty as asses, Harry."

"You know well enough who I mean. Is not Clarence Fairlie a happy man? I am sure he ought to be, if he is not," said Harry, sadly.

"Oh! you mean Clary?"

"Of course I do."

"And you ask me if I am working these slippers for him? *Now*, Harry! *do* you think that Clary, whose feet are as small and natty as any young lady's, *could* wear such long-boots as these?" laughed Halcyone, displaying the vast proportions of the slippers in question by spreading them out on her lap.

"Then I don't know for whom they are," said Harry.

"And you are not expected to know, for it is none of your business."

"They might be for my father. They look as if they would fit him."

"They *might* be for the Irish Giant. How good you are at guessing, Harry. Fancy your father wearing embroidered velvet slippers."

"Well, any how, they are not for Clary, as I supposed them to be. And putting that and something else together, I think their must be something the matter between you two. You have been here ten days now, and Clary hasn't been near you, whereas he used to come every day, or every second day at farthest. Is anything amiss, Halcyone? Anything that—that I could set right? I am at your service, Halcyone. Make use of me as—as a brother," said the young man, with an effort at magnanimity.

"There is nothing at all amiss between me and Clary. And I wish you wouldn't be officious, Harry. When I want a *'brother'* I'll let you know."

"I beg your pardon, Halcyone. I didn't mean to offend you. Don't be angry with me. Let us be friends at least," pleaded the young man, with such a heavy sigh

that it set all Halcyone's pretty party colored embroidery wool flying out of her lap.

She looked in his honest face and saw there so much sadness and regret that she understood and pitied him at once, and said:

"Well, I'm not angry with you, so don't look so cloudy and blow so hard—especially don't blow so hard. You'll give me cold. I never could stand a draught."

"How you mock me, Halcyone."

"I didn't mean to. And now as you *are* a sort of brother of mine after all, I think it due to you to tell you the true state of the case between me and Clary. We're off. He's not going to marry me; he is going to marry Fulvia Wall. That's the reason why I left the Forest Farm and came here, and that's the reason why he don't follow me."

"WHAT! Jilted you for her?" exclaimed the young man, bouncing up in a fine, genuine, generous fit of indignation. "I'll shoot him!"

"No, I beg you won't do it. I don't want any shooting and hanging on any terms whatever. Besides, he don't deserve it, poor, dear little soul. If there was any jilting between us, I jilted him. And if anybody is to be shot, shoot me, for I'm the one to blame," exclaimed Halcyone, beside herself with dismay.

"I don't understand you."

"I don't suppose you do—so I must explain—oh, dear! oh, dear! am I ever to be done expounding and explaining about Clary and myself to everybody in this world, whether it is any of their business or not? Just as if a girl couldn't change her mind, without being put upon trial for her life and having to defend herself? I'm sure we have a hard time enough of it *after* we are married, so we might have some privilege given us *before* hand, to change our minds half a dozen times if we like before we finally select a master for life."

"What are you talking of, Halcyone? I have not asked you for any explanation, my dear."

"Yes, but you're dying to hear one. And so I prefer to give it to you," said the young lady, glancing up to

Harry's face—which now shone bright with the new hopes that he could not conceal.

And so, for the third time since the dissolution of her engagement with Clary, Halcyone entered into a full explanation of her conduct and motives throughout that whole affair.

"And so your hand is free again," exclaimed Harry, in a tone of rapture.

"Yes; and Clary and I are better friends than we ever were before."

"Oh, my dear Halcyone, I am so delighted to hear it!"

"Yet you seemed to be very well pleased with my engagement to Clary, too. No one congratulated us so heartily as you did," exclaimed Halcyone, in a pet at the reminiscence.

"Didn't I tell you I was a donkey?—oh, Halcyone, I never knew how fond I was of you until you left Stormy Point. I did not even know it then, at first. It was not until after several days had passed, and you did not return, and I began to reflect that you would not return for a long time, and began to feel how dreary the house was without you, and how dreadful it would be when you would be gone for good, that I knew and felt how much I loved you, dear Halcyone."

He had spoken in a low, eager, breathless voice, and as he concluded he took her hand and tried to look in her face. But she gently drew away her hand, and turned her head. He was not much discouraged by these actions, however, for he continued:

"At first, I thought it was but a brother's fondness for one who had been his companion from childhood, and so when I could no longer bear our separation, I took to coming to see you at the Forest Farm. I remembered, of course, that you were engaged to be married to Clarence Fairlie, and I really had no intention of interfering with his just rights, but I reflected that I was as a brother to you, who had been brought up in my father's house, and I said to myself that as a brother I had a right to visit my sister. But, ah, Halcyone, I do not know which

was the greater trial—to stay away from you altogether, or to go and see you, the betrothed of another man."

And again he took her hand. And again she drew it away. And still he was not discouraged. He went on:

"And now that I know your hand is free, I dare to look into my own heart and read its feelings aright. I dare to own to myself that I love you—entirely. Shall I dare to own this love to you? Shall I dare to hope for a return?" he murmured, once more getting possession of her hand, and this time holding it very fast.

"You are a very 'daring' young man, upon your own showing, Harry! There's no knowing what you may 'dare' to do! But what, in the meantime, has become of your frenzy for Berenice?" demanded Halcyone.

Harry smiled and grew very red.

"You rightly term it a frenzy, Halcyone," he said. "It was a frenzy. Such love seldom survives such a disappointment. I had been gradually getting over mine even before your departure from Stormy Point revealed how dear you were to my heart. I need not say that revelation gave the final quietus to my 'frenzy.' And now, Halcyone—now—you will not keep me in suspense? You will tell me—you will tell me——" Poor Harry was as awkward at "popping the question" as true lovers usually are; so he stopped short in great confusion until his eyes fell upon the slippers which Halcyone, to conceal her own embarrassment, was again busily stitching. Then a bright inspiration came upon him; and he finished his sentence.

——"You will tell me—for whom you are working those handsome slippers?"

"Why, of course, for my future—future——" stammered Halcyone, blushing.

——"Husband?" suggested Harry.

"Yes," breathed Halcyone.

"And am I to wear them?"

"If you behave yourself," murmured Halcyone.

"I'll do it!" exclaimed Harry, joyfully.

And he forthwith "behaved himself" by catching her

up in his arms and kissing her ten times before she could prevent him.

And after a little more nonsense of the same sort, they went into the house feeling very happy.

When they went into the drawing-room they found Berenice deeply absorbed in the perusal of a note. She looked up as they entered, greeted them with a nod, and then resumed her reading until she had finished it.

"It is from Fulvia," she said, as she folded it up again. Basil's leave of absence has expired, and he has received orders to join his ship without delay. She is to sail from Boston for the West Coast of Africa on Monday next. The two sisters are going north with him to see him off. And Fulvia has written to beg me and Mrs. Jernyngham to join their party," said Berenice, looking up.

"Indeed! And shall you go?" inquired Halcyone.

"I don't know. It is so sudden. I think I should like the trip. But it will depend on Grandma' Jernyngham, of course. Will you excuse me while I go and speak to her?"

"Certainly," spoke both the lovers, in a breath.

Berenice left the room and went into that strict domestic sanctuary joining the kitchen, where Madam Journey was in the habit of administering her household affairs.

She found the old lady engaged in the congenial employment of capping strawberries. She immediately told her errand and read her note.

Mrs. Jernyngham was a woman of great decision of character. She made up her mind in a moment.

"We will go, Berenice. It will be a very good thing for you. We will see our young friend off, and then we will get back to New York in time to meet Vane Vandeleur on his return from Europe," said the old lady.

And then she turned over the task of capping the strawberries to one of her handmaids, and called another to attend her up stairs.

"I will see to the packing up of our clothing, while you write a note telling Fulvia of our decision. And tell her also, as we are so near the steamboat landing, she

and her party must come here and stay all night to-morrow night, to be ready to take the boat on the next morning. By the way, who brought that note?"

"The new boy they have got there."

"Tell the 'new boy' to make haste back with the answer, then," said Madam Journey, as they separated—she to her packing and Berenice to her writing.

This was the way it happened that "Mr. and Mrs. Basil Wall, the Misses Wall and Mrs. Jernyngham" came to be announced among the arrivals at a certain New York hotel on the very day that Vane Vandeleur reached the city.

The travellers had rested but one night, and had then gone on to Boston.

I need not describe that journey, nor the tearful leave-taking on the ship. Enough to say, that they left their young friend and relative as hopefully as was possible under the circumstances, and immediately hurried back to New York, to be in time to welcome the "homeward bound."

They found that the "Superior" had come in the day before; and, upon further inquiry, were told, as their informant believed, that Mr. Vandeleur had started by railroad for the south.

Of Father Francis they could hear nothing.

Under these circumstances they set out for their return home, hoping to meet Vane there.

The spirits of Berenice were weighed down with disappointment and with a vague presentiment of evil.

When she reached home, this presentiment was fulfilled by her finding that Vandeleur had neither been seen nor heard from.

"He has read my marriage notice in the papers, and drawn a wrong inference, and has forsaken me and gone to his far southern home," said Berenice in despair, speaking to her sole confidante, Madam Journey.

"I don't believe it, my dear. Wait and see," answered the more experienced old lady.

But Berenice would not take hope to her heart. Her long-tried spirit drooped again.

The old lady's prophecy, however, came true.

Berenice was seated the next day under the vines of the front piazza, when she heard a step upon the floor, and looking up, saw Vane Vandeleur standing before her.

She started up to greet him, with every feature of her beautiful face beaming with joy.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOVERS' MEETING.

VANE VANDELEUR raised his hand with a repellant gesture, and a look that sent Berenice back sinking to her seat.

He stood before her, pale, still and stern; gazing on her.

She lifted her eyes to his face with a deprecating glance and dropped them again.

But neither as yet broke the threatening silence. He would not yet speak. She could not.

"Your eyes fall under mine," he said at length, in low, slow, sad tones. "Your eyes fall under mine. I thought they would. There remains then but this——"

And he drew from his breast pocket a newspaper, turned to a paragraph at the head of a column on its fourth page, and, with his finger, struck upon it; and with his eyes still fixed on her face, he continued:

"*This* is what met me on my return to my native land, a fitting welcome for a faithful lover, don't you think? I read it! I read it! But I did not believe it. I did not trust the paper or my own eyes. I saw the arrival of yourself and your husband—perdition catch him!—announced in the New York papers. Still I could not credit the type or my own senses. I met Captain Storms on his vessel, and received his testimony confirming the reports I had read in the papers. Still, still, though I grieved, despaired, raved—in my heart of hearts I could not fully believe that you were false to me. I came here to-day

and your eyes fall before mine. Well, as I said, there is but one thing more. Your voice—your own words to confirm the news I have seen and heard. Now, Berenice, is this true?"

And he struck his hand sharply upon the marriage-notice and looked in her face.

She had been trying to interrupt him at several points of his bitter speech, but her tongue "clove to the roof of her mouth." Now she tried again, with but little more success.

"Oh, Vane, if you knew all——"

"*Is this true?*" he fiercely demanded. That is all I require to know!"

"Vane! Vane! I was not to blame! Let me explain——"

"Is THIS TRUE? TRUE? TRUE? Yes or no?"

"Oh, it is true! But you *must* hear——"

He turned from her with a fierce stamp and strode away.

She sprang after him and caught his arm and hung upon it with all her weight, exclaiming:

"Oh, Vane, hear me! Hear me explain! You are all—all wrong! I——"

"Let me go, woman! Take off your hands! Your touch is fire!" he cried.

"I will not let you go until you hear the truth!" she exclaimed, holding him fast.

"Free me, I say! I would not use force even with you! You have maddened me! You have ruined me! You have done your worst! Now let me go, if you have any mercy left!"

"Not till you hear the truth, Vane! Not till you hear me! I am——"

"Ah, well then, if I must, I must!" he cried, trying to twist her clinging hands from his arm."

"——I am no one's wife! I am old Basil Wall's maiden widow for your sake—for your sake!" she cried.

But in that cry of anguish and appeal went forth the last remnant of her failing strength. Her long strained nerves gave way, and she fainted on his arm.

"And now I hope you are satisfied, you violent young man!" exclaimed a voice at his side.

He turned and saw Madam Journey.

The sound of the altercation had reached her ears as she sat at work in her morning room, and had drawn her to the spot.

"And now I hope you are satisfied," she said.

Vane did not answer her at all. He scarcely heard or saw her. He was gazing down panic-stricken upon the beautiful, pale face on his arm. He understood the whole affair now. Her last fainting words revealed the whole truth of the action and its motive, as well as an elaborate explanation could have done, even without the aid of the widow's dress, which he now observed for the first time.

Madam Journey saw his look of remorse and sorrow, and pitied him and forgave him at once.

"Bring her in after me. I will recover her easily," said the old lady, very kindly.

"Oh, Madam, I can not expect you to pardon me. I have been a brute!" groaned Vane, without removing his eyes from the still white face before him.

"You were misled by appearances, as an older and wiser man might have been. Don't be alarmed. She will be all right in a moment. I can't think why Berenice should ever faint at any cause. She is the first of our race that ever did faint. But I suppose it is all owing to the trouble her poor mother had in the months just previous to her birth. There, lay her down on the sofa, with her head quite low," said Madam Journey, as she led the way to the morning room, followed by Vane Vandeleur, tenderly bearing his beloved burden.

He laid her on the sofa with great care, and knelt beside her.

"That's very pretty, but it's not practical. Get up, Mr. Vandeleur, and let me come to the child," said Madam Journey, approaching with a palm leaf fan in one hand and a bottle of smelling salts in the other.

Vane arose with a bow and made way for the old lady.

"Now if you wish to be useful you may open all the

windows and give her as much air as possible," said Madam Journey.

Vane quickly obeyed her instructions, and then came and stood near the head of the sofa, anxiously gazing down upon the motionless white face of Berenice.

There were no other persons in the room. The other ladies were out on a round of morning calls. Very soon Berenice opened her eyes. And instantly she recalled the crisis.

"Has he gone, dear Grandma' Journey? Has he gone? Oh, call him back," she faintly but earnestly pleaded.

"He is here, my dear, and all is well," whispered the old lady, with a reassuring smile. Then turning to Vane, she said:

"I will leave you alone with her now, to make your peace," and she rose and went out of the room.

Vane was at Berenice's feet in a moment.

"I have been a wretch, a very wretch!—can you, oh! can you forgive me, my darling?" he cried.

"I can do nothing but love you, dear Vane. Welcome home. Oh, welcome, welcome home!" she murmured, with eyes beaming rapture.

A little later on they were sitting side by side on the sofa.

She was giving him a full, detailed history of her nominal marriage with the dying patriarch, and as she spoke of the heavenly goodness pervading old Basil Wall's life and death, she wept, and Vane felt like weeping with her.

Then they spoke of their future plans, and they both agreed, in love and honor for the good old man who had intervened to secure their welfare, whose last thoughts had been for their happiness, to let a whole year elapse before they should marry.

"And then, Vane," she added, with a light laugh and slight blush, "then nothing will be left to trouble our peace. Not only has every condition of the awful Indian oracle been fulfilled, but even the silly little prediction in the fortune-telling book will be verified. It said I was to be 'wedded, widowed, and childless in a year.' And I

have already been wedded and widowed, and of course I am childless."

"And another foolish prediction on my side will be made good," added Vane. "When I was on that disastrous 'filibustering' expedition to Cuba, an old Obi woman insisted on telling my fortune, for she said I had a remarkable one. I remembered the little creole girl for whom the other Obi woman had predicted a crown, and who afterwards became the Empress of France, and so, half in fun and half in earnest, I let her tell my fortune. She told me of a future worthy of a knight in fairy lore. I forget the details; but there was a sailing ship, a broad bay, an old mansion-house, and a distressed damsel in it, I know. And when I was on board the Carrier coming down the Chesapeake, I thought of it. When I came in sight of Henniker House and heard something of you and your history I thought of it again. When I was actually cast away on your coast, I thought of it more seriously than ever. I remember saying to myself, 'Who can escape his destiny?' And yet all this is mere coincidence. You will not start at the word now, dear Berenice—all mere coincidence. We are children of the nineteenth century. We laugh at dreams, omens, predictions and the like."

"I do not know," replied Berenice, gravely shaking her head. "Children of all centuries have more or less believed in these mysteries. And the children of the nineteenth seem to have a peculiar tendency to the mystic."

They were interrupted by the sudden arrival of Mrs. Dering and Mrs. Brooke, who had returned from their drive.

The entrance of these ladies made a healthy change. They both gave Vandeleur a hearty welcome. And Mrs. Brooke asked if he had brought his luggage, or if not, where she could send for it.

"For," she said, "of course, my dear Vane, you, while you remain in this neighborhood, must have no other home but ours."

He thanked the lady with a bow and a smile, accepted

her invitation, but begged to spare her all trouble, by himself looking after the removal of his own luggage.

After dinner that day there was a general family talk between Vandeleur and the ladies of Henniker, in which the ladies learned for a certainty what they had already suspected as a probability—that as Berenice was the youngest descendant of the first lady of the manor, so Vane was the last representative of the Colonial cavalier and the Indian princess. And, therefore, not only would all the conditions of the prophecy be fulfilled, but also the feud of centuries would be ended in their happy union.

CHAPTER XVII.

WOMAN'S TRIUMPH.

Captain Thomas Storms having just landed his passengers and a portion of his cargo at Henniker, put his vessel about and continued his course up the bay, and then up the river for Alexandria and Georgetown, where he delivered large consignments of goods to certain commission merchants.

Finally he started for his home voyage and arrived about the first of July at Henniker, where he determined to lay up for a month or two.

Before going to his own house he visited Widowville, to see, not only his favorite widows, but also his darling adopted daughter, Halcyone.

Here a great and unexpected happiness met him. He found his son Harry on one of his daily visits to his betrothed.

And the old gentleman had scarcely shaken hands with the ladies of Henniker and kissed Halcyone, before Harry took that young girl by the hand and asked his father's blessing on their betrothal.

Captain Tom, in his surprise and ecstacy, first threw his hat up to the ceiling and caught it in his hands, and then snatched up little Halcyone as if she had been a

baby, and hugged her to his heart and nearly smothered her with kisses.

Then blowing very hard, he sat her on his knee and looked at her. She was laughing and blushing and breathless like himself.

"And so, you little rogue! you will continue to be my daughter, after all; and no man will come between you and me to part us! Let me kiss you again——"

"Don't guardy! You scratch my face! You haven't shaved for six weeks!"

"Oh, what a bouncer! I shaved day before yesterday. It's the warm weather makes my beard grow so. And so you are never to leave me, my darling of darlings. I'm as delighted—yes, I am quite as much delighted as if one of my adorable widows had consented to make me happy. But," exclaimed the old man, in sudden recollection and consternation, "I had forgotten about Clary. How about Clary? Halcy, much as I covet you for my son, Harry, I would not have you break faith with any one, either to secure your own happiness or ours."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" whimpered Halcyone. "I thought I had done expounding and explaining about that little brute. And I *have* done, too!" she added, defiantly. "I won't expound and explain any more—*that* I won't! Guardy! It's enough for you to know that we girls have our own way."

"As if you ever had anything else," put in the captain. "But what particular turn of perversity did your way take on this occasion?"

"Why, since we were obliged to be married, we made up our minds to please ourselves, that's all."

"As how, pray?"

"Why, you see, guardy—there, I say, don't try to kiss me again; if you do, I'll get off your knee. I'd just as leave have a nettle near my face as your chin, guardy."

"Well, well, I'll try to keep it at respectful distance. But you were saying——"

"I was saying we were all at cross-purposes. I rather liked Harry, having been used to him all my life, but—Och, hub-bub-boo!—Harry preferred Berry, who was

engaged to Vane Vandeleur. Fulvia favored Clary, who fancied himself in love with your humble servant. Flavia appreciated Pike Turner, who believed himself bound to Pinky Skinner. And Pinky Skinner adored—Captain Tom Storms, who worships the Widows of Widowville. Now, here was a pretty tangle. All at sixes and sevens. At last Fulvia and I put our heads together and resolved to straighten it all out, and we have done it. *How*, it would take too long to tell now. But we thought we women ought to have *our* way, and we've got it. Vane Vandeleur is 'taken in and done for' by Berenice; Harry by me; Clary by Fulvia; Pike by Flavia; and Captain Thomas Storms——"

"No, I thank you!" exclaimed Old Tom, dropping Halcyone and starting up, "not if *I* know that old salt. There's one woman who won't have her way. I'm blessed if there isn't!"

"Take care, guardy! *"Guardez vous, guardy!* 'Let not him who putteth on his armor boast himself, as he who taketh it off.' Wait a bit," laughed Halcyone.

"*She* may wait a bit!" exclaimed the old man, pulling a large bandana handkerchief from his pocket and furiously wiping his face, as was his custom when excited; and then clapping his hat upon his head with an emphatic thump, and then hastily pulling it off again at the recollection that he stood in the presence of ladies.

"Oh, guardy!" persisted the teaser. "She has waited long enough already. And, besides, remember your promise to old Mr. Basil Wall on his death-bed."

"Umph! Umph! Umph! I never promised to marry Pinky Skinner! No, that I didn't! And I won't, neither!" exclaimed the old sailor. And the more doubtful he felt about his resolution, the more firmly he persisted in declaring it.

The entrance of Berenice and Vandeleur, who now came in from their morning walk, was a positive relief to Captain Storms, inasmuch as it diverted the subject of conversation from himself.

He shook hands heartily with his young friends, both of whom gave him a very cordial welcome home.

He spent a very pleasant day at Widowville, and then at sundown, accompanied by Harry, set out to return to his own house.

Halcyone was destined to have another pleasant surprise that day.

Captain Storms and Mr. Harry had scarcely turned their backs on Henniker House before the drawing-room door was opened by Euripides, who ushered in Father Bonhomme and Father Francis Carroll.

Both were well received by the ladies of Henniker; and Father Francis, in particular, was warmly welcomed by Halcyone.

He explained to her that he had been detained in New York by the long illness of an old servant, who had, within a few days, expired, with a good hope of eternal happiness; that, immediately after the funeral of this man, he—Francis Carroll—had set out by railroad for Washington, and, on reaching the city, had taken the steamer for Henniker. The steamer had arrived at the port early in the afternoon. And after dining with his brother priest at St. Rosalie, and learning from them that Halcyone was with the ladies of Henniker, he had come over with Father Bonhomme to see her, and to thank them for their kindness.

The priests' call was short, and after half an hour's talk with their friends, they returned to St. Rosalie.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CAPTAIN'S COMING HOME.

Captain Storms and Mr. Harry reached Stormy Point about their usual supper time. But there was no supper ready to refresh the tired travellers. No, nor anything else to comfort them on their coming home.

The captain looked around upon his house in consternation and dismay, and then he looked in the face of his son with a stern, inquiring expression that seemed to demand:

"What the deuce have you been doing to the place?"

Mr. Harry laughed, and answered the question as if it had been uttered.

"We have been keeping bachelor's hall in it, without any housekeeper."

"Umph, umph, umph, umph!" groaned the captain, dropping into a dusty chair, and again looking round in stupefaction.

But I can better make you understand his state of feelings and account for his after conduct by telling you how he would have found his home during Pinky Skinner's administration, and how he found it under the bachelor rule of Messrs. Dick and Harry.

In Pinky Skinner's time, he would have found order, cleanliness, and comfort everywhere about the premises. The very yard, flower-borders, and avenue leading to the house would have been neatly swept, raked and trimmed.

The house and every room in the house, with its walls and windows, floors and ceilings, would have been perfectly clean and fresh, cool and shady; all the shutters half closed, and the open fire-places whitewashed within, and garnished with fragrant green cedar boughs.

In the dining-room he would have found a neatly set table, covered with a clean white cloth, adorned with glittering cups and saucers, and with shining knives and forks, and spoons, and spread with all the domestic luxuries of the season—such as fragrant coffee and tea, fresh milk and cream, white light bread, sweet new butter, broiled spring chickens, crisp green salad, ripe fruit, and, in a word, all that could please the palate of the old gourmand.

In his own chamber he would have found his wash stand and dressing table arranged and supplied with every convenience necessary to his toilet, and with a complete clean change of clothing laid out upon the bed.

Now, under the bachelor rule of Messrs. Dick and Harry, what did he find? My pen shrinks from the description!

First of all, the lawn, parterres, and walks were in the worst stage of neglect, disorder, and dirt—the lawn lit-

tered with fish heads, meat bones and egg-shells, as if all the carnivori about the farm had turned it into a salamander—the walks strewed with sticks, scraps of papers, and bits of rags; the parterres run to seed and choked with weeds.

"I think, at least, you and Harry might have kept *this* in decent order, Dick," said the old captain, in much displeasure, as he looked upon the scene of neglect.

"Harry and I had as much as we could do to look after the farm-yard and fields. This door-yard and flower-garden is the women's business. Miss Pinky always used to attend to it," answered Mr. Dick.

The old sailor groaned, and passed into the house.

Bad as was the condition of the grounds, that of the house was still worse. The floors of the door-steps and front passage were covered with grease and grime.

The dining-room was worst of all. Its boards and walls were dirtied and discolored, its doors and windows smeared by soiled hands and speckled with fly-dirt, its corners hung with cobwebs, its furniture covered with dust, and all the air filled with flies buzzing about in swarms and marking everything they lighted on. In the middle of the floor stood the table, covered with a ragged and soiled cloth, and loaded with the unwashed breakfast-service and fragments of broken victuals, upon which the flies had settled in myriads.

The captain, dropping half-dead upon his chair, groaned aloud, and then demanded sharply:

"Dick! Harry! what the deuce is all this?"

"We can't get the maids to do their duty. They want to be followed up all the time, and there's nobody to do that when we are in the field."

"*I'll* make 'em do it, the idle wretches! *I'll* follow 'em up, you bet!" exclaimed the irascible old sailor.

And then he trotted up stairs to wash his hands. But of all the deplorable places he had seen yet, his chamber was the most disheartening. The floor, chairs, and tables all covered with dust half an inch thick; the window-glass opaque with dirt; the bed and bed-linen yellow with neg-

lect; the wall hung with cobwebs, heavy with dust and peopled with spiders.

He looked into his water pitcher, and instead of water, found a deposit of gritty sediment and half a dozen large cockroaches.

No longer able to control his fury, the wretched captain rushed down stairs.

"Harry!" he exclaimed, bursting into the dining-room, "go and send those she-devils in to me!"

"Father, remember they are women," expostulated Harry.

"Blow them to atoms, I won't remember anything!" fiercely returned the old sailor, stamping up and down the floor.

Under these conditions Harry did not stir a step to call the culprits up to judgment.

Captain Storms saw and understood his son's inactivity and rushed himself up to the back-door and bawled:

"Ailie! Mary! you wretches, come here!"

One only responded to the summons. Ailie came in, simpering and twisting her apron, saying:

"Glad to see you home safe once more, Marse Tom, sir! 'Deed is I!"—just as if she had been doing her whole duty and expected a present, as heretofore.

"Go to the deuce, you——! What do you mean by daring to stand there smiling in my face after all your idleness and rascality?" demanded the captain.

The girl immediately grew grave and hung her head.

"Where's the other one? Where's Mary?"

"Mary done gone to the village and ain't come back yet, Marse Tom, sir."

"Very well, I'll settle with her when I see her. But now for you! How dare you let me find my place in the condition it is?"

" 'Deed, Marse Tom, 'taint my fault, sir. I didn't put it in no conditions."

"No, blame you! I know you didn't! Look at my lawn and flower-beds! Turned into a perfect bear's garden!"

" 'Deed, Marse Tom, there ain't been no bears in there,

sir! 'Deed there isn't! which I'd been feared of my life to stay about the place if there had been. It's the dogs, sir. They will tote all their wittles and bones and things onto the grass to lay down and gnaw 'em, and we can't 'vent 'em from doing of it."

"You can't drive them off and you can't sweep the walks nor weed the flower-beds—oh, no!"

" 'Deed, Marse Tom, us hasn't got any time to tend to the garden. So much to do in the house."

"In the house, you——! How dare you say that in the condition the house now is? Look at this most disgraceful room—something between a pig-sty and shambles!"

" 'Deed, Marse Tom, there ain't been no pigs in here, sir. I drives 'em away every time I see 'em coming in."

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!" grunted the provoked captain.

"And if it's the table you are talking about, sir, 'deed it's Mary's place to clar away the table and wash the dishes, which she went to the willage this morning and hasn't been back yet."

"Whose place is it to keep my bed-room in order? Tell me that, you good-for-nothing!"

"It's mine, Marse Tom, which I would a done it if I had a known how you was a coming home to-night, sir."

"Oh, you—you—you——! I wish you were a boy, and I'd thrash you within an inch of your life! Demmy I would! Get out of my sight before I do you a mischief! Go and get supper ready. And do it quicker and better than you ever did anything in your life—begone!"

Ailie, glad to escape from her angry master's presence, hurried away to the kitchen, leaving the old man to tear at his gray hair and beard and stamp up and down the disordered room.

It was a long time before supper could be got ready, and even then the meal was badly dressed and worse served. Hungry as he was, the miserable captain could scarcely touch anything.

It is needless to enlarge upon the poor man's discomforts.

He had boasted that he would follow up his servants

and keep them to their duty. But he found that was more easily said than done.

The women were willing, but they were ignorant and incapable. They needed to be instructed rather than to be scolded. So all the captain's following up was quite useless. When he soundly rated them for their shortcomings, they were humble and apologetic. When he went farther and gave them what he called "An awful blowing up," they became so terrified and confused that they did everything worse than ever.

Neither could he get rid of them or change them for others. They were his own. Their forefathers and foremothers had been servants to his own for many generations past. He would as soon have thought of discarding his son Harry and adopting some other young man as of changing Ailie or Mary for other servants.

To be sure, he had one vague, distant hope—that when Harry should marry Halcyone and they should settle down to live with him, she might in time learn the neglected arts of housekeeping and make his house habitable for him once more. And this was the more necessary consummation, because he was growing somewhat weary of the sea and disposed to pass more of his time at home. But ah! he knew that it would be some months yet before Harry and Halcyone would be married, and that it would take years before Halcyone could attain the domestic accomplishments that were so needful to the comfort and happiness of the old man.

But even this distant prospect of improvement was destined to fade away.

Captain Storms was called to St. Rosalie to consult with Father Francis Carroll on the future plans of their young people. And in course of that consultation it was clearly shown to the old seaman that it would be eminently necessary for Harry and Halcyone, immediately after their marriage, to proceed to Scotland to take possession of the bride's estate and to live upon it the greater part of each year.

When the wretched captain came home from that decisive interview and found his domestic affairs in a worse

condition than ever, and saw no hope of a change, he took a sudden resolution. He said to himself:

"I will go and fetch Pinky Skinner home upon her own terms. She's got a devil of a temper, to be sure, but it all vents itself through her tongue. She never *did* take her spite out on my victuals and clothes. And I have heard of some women that would actually smoke the coffee, burn the beefsteak and underbake the bread on purpose to punish their lords and masters. Pinky never did that. No matter how mad I might drive her with 'my Widows,' as she called them, she always set me a table that couldn't be beat and kept my house and clothes and servants in perfect order. And what is an occasional tongue lashing, to be set against all these blessings? Nothing at all! Besides, when Pinky finds it necessary for her health to blow me up, I can go out of hearing or stuff cotton wool in my ears, or fancy I am at sea, and hearing the winds and waves roaring about me. I'll do it!"

True to his resolution, the next morning the old captain called Bobadilla to his bed-side, and ordered him to wash the carriage and curry the horses, and put on his best clothes to drive to town.

"And here!" exclaimed the captain, calling after him as he went out, "look up that white satin cabbage you had pinned on your coat the day Miss Pinky went away, and pin it on again. I am going to fetch your new missus home."

"Oh! indeed, Marse Tom. 'Deed I'se mons'ous glad, for we wants her here proper bad," exclaimed Bobadilla, whose domestic comforts had suffered almost as much as his master's through the absence of Miss Skinner.

True also to his conceptions of what was becoming on the occasion, the captain arose and trimmed his hair and beard, and shaved and washed himself clean and neat, and dressed in his best summer Sunday suit.

When he had breakfasted, he entered the carriage and drove away, leaving Dick and Harry gazing after him, and wondering what he was going to do.

As it was very early in the morning, he drove first to

Leonardtown, where he transacted a little business with the recorder's clerk at the court-house, and then turned the horses' heads towards the Forest Farm.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon when he reached the old house, and the first thing that struck him as he drew up before the door was the improved neatness and cleanliness of the whole aspect of the place, and he had no difficulty in ascribing it to the fact of Miss Pinky's residence there.

He left the carriage in the care of his coachman and knocked at the door and inquired of the servant who opened it, for Miss Skinner.

He was shown at once into her presence.

She was in the room where old Basil Wall had died, and which was now turned back to its original use as the common family sitting-room.

She was alone, and seated by the front window, shelling peas from a natty little basket on her lap into a white dish on the table.

"How do you do, my dear?" said the captain, who had been working himself up into a fit of grateful admiration and tenderness for Miss Pinky, and now addressed her quite affectionately.

"How do you do yourself?" responded the self-possessed Miss Skinner, briskly shelling away at her peas.

"Ah—ah—how are the young ladies?" inquired the captain, removing his hat and seating himself beside her.

"They are well. If you came to see them, they are not at home. They are gone to spend the day at Henniker House, I'm sorry to say."

"*I'm* not sorry at all, Pinky, my dear. I didn't come to see them. I came to see you, and I am very glad to find you here by yourself."

No answer from Miss Pinky, whose attention was engrossed by the peas.

"I had something very particular to say to you, Pinky, my dear," added the suitor, wondering whether she would help him out.

No, she wouldn't—not by a word, look, or gesture. She had had enough of helping him out, once before.

And besides, she was not sure of his intentions even now.

"I have come to ask you to make friends with me, Pinky, my dear," he said, and waited for an answer.

But she only bent her head lower over the peas, and shelled faster.

"Come, Pinky, honey, let's make friends."

"I never was your enemy, Captain Storms," she then replied.

"I know you were not, my dear. You were the most faithful friend I ever had in my life; though I was such an old dunderhead as not to know it until I had lost you. Come, Pinky, let's kiss and make up."

"I never kissed a man in my life, Captain Storms, and I never will; and you know it," said Miss Pinky, with a toss of her red hair.

"Not if he is going to be your husband, my dear? Not if he asks you for it as a seal to a document like this?" asked the captain, drawing the marriage license from his pocket, and laying it on the top of the dish of peas immediately before her eyes.

"Well! I think it takes two to make that bargain, Captain Storms. You should have asked me before you took such a freedom with my name as that," said Miss Pinky, as she read the form of the license.

"I know I ought, my dear. But I am a blunder-headed old fool, that is always doing what he oughtn't to do, and letting alone what he ought. But you'll overlook it, Pinky, my dear; you'll overlook it for this once, and I'll never do so any more."

But Pinky overlooked nothing but her peapods.

"Come, Pinky! I drove over here to-day to fetch you home; to fetch you home on your own terms, and foever! For, oh! my dear, you don't know how I have missed you! And—maybe you have missed your old home, Pinky, eh?"

"May-be I have, and may-be I haven't," answered the noncommittal Miss Skinner.

"Come, Pinky! I have got the license already, as you see, and there's nothing in life to prevent your becoming Mrs. Captain Storms to-day. So, if you have got that

beautiful dress and shawl and bonnet handy, just go and put them on, like a good girl, and we'll drive right over to St. Rosalie and be married."

"And what would the Miss Walls say when they came home and found me married and gone so suddenly?"

"What do you care what they might say? You are not their slave, I reckon. But, if you feel any scruples about the matter, *I'll tell* them that we have been engaged ever so long, and that we always did intend to be married as soon as I came home from this trip. Come, Pinky, my dear, go get ready; and while you're doing it I will find a pen and ink and write a note of explanation and leave for them, against they come home. Come, my good little woman, hurry up!" he exclaimed, seeing that she did not move.

"No, Captain Storms, I can't do anything so very improper. I can't jump at a man the minute he asks me to marry him," she said, so positively that her suitor saw it would be no use for him to dispute her will. So he said:

"Well, I'll give you twenty-four hours, my dear, and come after you again this time to-morrow."

"No, Captain Storms, that would be quite as bad as to-day."

"I'll give you a week, then, and return for you on this day week. But don't keep me waiting more than a week, Pinky, my dear."

"But I must, Captain Storms. I cannot leave these young girls in the lurch," persisted Pinky.

"But you left me in the lurch!" exclaimed the captain, stretching his eyes.

"That was a different thing. You were a man, and able to take care of yourself——"

"I was a man; but I'm blowed if I was able to take care of myself," interrupted the captain.

——"And these are two unprotected girls living in a lonely farm-house by themselves. I cannot leave them until they are married."

"'Until they are married!' Oh, oh, oh, oh! Hear her! Suppose they don't marry for years? Suppose they never marry? Am I to live in misery all my life for their

sakes?" exclaimed Old Tom, jumping out of his chair, and trotting up and down the floor, in great heat.

"They will be married very soon, Captain Storms. Just as soon as Pike Turner gets back from the West he will marry Flavia, and at the same time Clarence Fairlie is to marry Fulvia. And then the farm will be let."

"And *then* will you marry, me, Pinky? Say yes, at once!" pleaded the old man.

But Miss Pinky, now that she felt sure he was in earnest, could not be induced to say yes at once. It took some hard coaxing on the part of her old suitor before she could be persuaded to say yes at last.

"And now then we are engaged!" exclaimed the captain—"and so, Pinky, you may not mind telling me, my dear, is it true that you always did like me a little?"

This was almost too much for Miss Skinner's equanimity. She burst into tears, as she answered, impatiently:

"Do you think if I hadn't liked you I would have refused all the offers of marriage I ever had, and I had some very good offers, for I was thought pretty a long time ago when I was young——"

"You are young yet, Pinky, my dear. Young yet, compared to me," soothingly put in the captain. But she continued, without noticing the interruption:

——"Do you think I would have refused all offers of marriage for the sake of living with you and being your servant—for I was no better than a hired servant—if I hadn't liked you? And do you think I could have slaved and slaved to make you comfortable, as I have done for years, and worn out the best part of my life in your service, if I hadn't liked you?"

"No, my dear woman, you wouldn't; and I was a donkey not to have seen this before. But never mind, Pinky; I will do all I can to make the rest of your life happy. I will indeed, my dear. You shall be a proud and happy woman yet. But tell me, my dear, how was it you ever came to like me?"

"How do I know?" sobbed the poor creature. "I liked you ever since I was a little, pale, sickly child, and you used to take me on your knee and pet me."

"And I was a middle-aged man even then. Heaven help me! And you have liked me all along, poor child, and I such a donkey as not to know it?"

"It was all the widows! It was all the fault of the widows," sobbed Miss Pinky.

"There, there, my dear; never mind the widows. It was all a joke of mine—a standing joke, Pinky. I used to declare I was in love with all the widows; and how could I be in love with them all at the same time? Besides, they don't like me particularly, and you do. So don't cry any more, but wipe your eyes and think how comfortable we are going to be when I get you back to Stormy Point. And I wish it was to-day. And I mean to have the old house thoroughly repaired and refurnished, and you shall choose the new furniture to suit yourself. Come, Pinky, don't cry any more."

"I can't, I haven't got time to cry. I have got to finish shelling these peas if you are to have them for your dinner. You will stay to dinner, won't you?" she inquired, wiping her eyes and looking up.

"*Won't I?* Why, my dear woman, I haven't had a decent meal since I got home," answered old Tom.

And he staved and dined tête-à-tête with Pinky, and went home in the evening, feeling better pleased than he ever could have believed he should be, as the accepted suitor of Miss Skinner.

Three months after this time, Pike Turner, having prepared his home in the West, returned to claim the hand of his promised wife, the fair-haired Flavia. Clarence Fairlie having won his old kinsman's consent, pressed his suit with Fulvia, and by mutual arrangement, the two sisters were married at the same time and place, to their respective lovers.

Pike Turner carried off his blue-eyed bride to brighten his wild western lodge.

Clarence conducted his beautiful wife home to Hourie Hall, to bless the lives of all the dwellers there.

Captain Storms married Miss Skinner, and took her back to keep house for him at Stormy Point. And it is

but just to Pinky to say that he ever after congratulated himself upon that step.

In due course of time Vane Vandeleur and Berenice were married with great *éclat* at St. Rosalie's Chapel—Father Bonhomme performing at the ceremony, and Major Hourie giving away the bride.

On the same occasion Halcyone became the wife of Harry Storms.

Mrs. Jernyngham gave the brides a grand reception at Henniker House, at which were present not only all the gentry of the three neighboring counties, but every one of the newly married couples we have named, for even Pike Turner and Flavia came from their far western home to grace these happy nuptials.

THE END.

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